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DORIS LESSING's latest novel is *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (HarperFlamingo). . . .University of California Press recently published **ADAM MICHNIK**'s *Letters from Freedom*, translated from the Polish by **JANE CAVE**. . . .*Another Beauty* by **ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI**, translated by **CLARE CAVANAGH**, is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. . . .**THOMAS NOWOTNY** writes on the future of Europe and on the Austrian Social Democracy. . . .**STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**'s latest work, *Kosovo: Background to a War*, was published by Anthem Press last spring. . . .**DOMINIQUE SCHNAPPER** is Director of Studies in Social Sciences at the École des Hautes Études in Paris. . . . **JIM TUCKER** is a translator living in New York. . . .**ELIZABETH DALTON**, Professor of English at Barnard College, is currently writing a book on psychoanalysis and fiction. . . .**KAREN WILKIN** helped to organize "Stuart Davis in Gloucester," seen at the National Academy Museum this summer. . . .**MORRIS DICKSTEIN** recently edited *The Revival of Pragmatism* (Duke University Press). . . .In 1998-99 **TRACY SALVAGE** was Visiting Professor/Artist-in-Residence at Adelphi University. . . .*The Naked Scarecrow* is **RICHARD MOORE**'s most recent book of poetry. . . .**MAXIM D. SHRAYER** is Assistant Professor of Russian Literature at Boston College, and editor of the forthcoming *Anthology of Russian-Jewish Literature*. . . .**MILLICENT BELL** is Professor of English Emerita at Boston University . . . .**C. DALE YOUNG**'s *The Day Underneath the Day* is due for publication by Northwestern University Press next spring. . . .Grove Press will publish *Louise in Love* by **MARY JO BANG** and *Say Uncle* by **KAY RYAN**. . . .**BROOKS HAXTON**'s most recent book, *Dances for Flute and Thunder* (Viking Press), was nominated for the 2000 PEN Award for Poets in Translation. . . .**VALERIE WOHLFELD**'s collection, *Thinking the World Visible*, won the Yale Younger Poets Award and was published in 1994 by Yale University Press. . . .*Diva* (Duke University Press) is the award-winning book of poetry written by **RAFAEL CAMPO** with the support of a Guggenheim fellowship. . . . **WALTER LAQUEUR**'s *Portrait of a Generation* is forthcoming from University Press of New England. . . .**EDITH KURZWEIL** is the editor of *Partisan Review*. . . .**SCOTT CAMPBELL** teaches at the School of Philosophy, University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. . . .**JEFFREY HERF** will be joining the Department of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, this fall.

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Comment

Robert Conquest has finally received his due by political observers for being one of the very few anti-communists who before 1989 said the Soviet Union was politically and economically in trouble. His latest book, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, is a very impressive and painstaking account of the twentieth century with particular reference to the two totalitarian regimes: the Nazis and the Communists.

Conquest has a detailed historical account of the development of modern societies; he has a lengthy and profound analysis especially of the formation of nation-states and of the rise of nationalism. Conquest emphasizes both the benefits of some nationalisms and the dangers of excessive nationalism. He is quite an original in his detailed observations of how the forces of nationalism played a part in the rise of both fascism and communism. Conquest's year-by-year account of the terror, and the political and economic failures, covered up by ideology, propaganda, and false statistics is, as far as I know, the most illuminating ever written. His analysis of the forces of the entire century, with special references to the totalitarian societies, is most interesting, fresh in its details and its depth. In fact, his refutation of the claims of Marx's theories and political ideas is the most thorough I have seen.

Conquest makes a fascinating comparison of fascism and communism indicating the commonalities and developments as well as the differences. And he is especially sharp and humorous about the blind supporters of communism, whom Lenin referred to as "useful idiots." Though this book dwells only on the major movements of totalitarianism, it does offer a novel political history of the twentieth century.

WP

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DORIS LESSING

From *Ben, in the World*

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

This reply did not come at once because Ben was afraid of what he knew was going to happen now, which was that the young man behind the glass protecting him from the public set down his pen on the form he was filling in, and then, with a look on his face that Ben knew only too well, inspected his client. He was allowing himself amusement that was impatient, but it was not quite derision. He was seeing a short, stout, or at least heavily built man—he was wearing a jacket too big for him—who must be at least forty. And that face! It was a broad face, with strongly delineated features, a mouth stretched in a grin—what did he think was so bloody funny?—a broad nose with flaring nostrils, eyes that were greenish, with sandy lashes, under bristly sandy brows. He had a short neat pointed beard that didn't fit with the face. His hair was yellow and seemed—like his grin—to shock and annoy, long, and falling forward in a slope, and in stiff locks on either side, as if trying to caricature a fashionable cut. To cap it all, he was using a posh voice; was he taking the mickey? The clerk was going in for this minute inspection because he was discommoded by Ben to the point of feeling angry. He sounded peevish when he said, "You can't be eighteen. Come on, what's your real age?"

Ben was silent. He was on the alert, every little bit of him, knowing there was danger. He wished he had not come to this place, which could close its walls around him. He was listening to the noises from outside, for reassurance from his normality. Some pigeons were conversing in a plane tree on the pavement, and he was with them, thinking how they sat gripping twigs with pink claws that he could feel tightening around his own finger; they were contented, with the sun on their backs. Inside here, were sounds that he could not understand until he had isolated

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Editor's Note: From the book *Ben, in the World* by Doris Lessing, to be published in August by HarperCollins Publishers Inc. Copyright © 2000 by Doris Lessing.

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each one. Meanwhile the young man in front of him was waiting, his hand holding the pen and fiddling it between his fingers. A telephone rang just beside him. On either side of him were several young men and women with that glass in front of them. Some used instruments that clicked and chattered, some stared at screens where words appeared and went. Each of these noisy machines Ben knew was probably hostile to him. Now he moved slightly to one side, to get rid of the reflections on the glass that were bothering him, and preventing him from properly seeing this person who was angry with him.

"Yes. I am eighteen," he said.

He knew he was. When he had gone to find his mother, three winters ago—he did not stay because his hated brother Paul had come in—she had written in large words on a piece of card:

> Your name is Ben Lovatt.
> Your mother's name is Harriet Lovatt.
> Your father's name is David Lovatt.
> You have four brothers and sisters, Luke, Helen, Jane, and Paul. They are older than you.
> You are fifteen years old.

On the other side of the card had been:

> You were born .....
> Your home address is .....

This card had afflicted Ben with such a despair of rage that he took it from his mother, and ran out of the house. He scribbled over the name *Paul*, first. Then, the other siblings. Then, the card falling to the floor and picked up showing the reverse side, he scribbled with his black pen over all the words there, leaving only a wild mess of lines.

That number, fifteen, kept coming up in questions that were always—so he felt—being put to him. "How old are you?" Knowing it was so important, he remembered it, and when the year turned around at Christmas, which no one could miss, he added a year. Now I am sixteen. Now I am seventeen. Now, because a third winter has gone, I am eighteen.

"OK, then, when were you born?"

With every day since he had scribbled with that angry black pen all over the back of the card he had understood better what a mistake he had made. And he had destroyed the whole card, in a culminating fit of

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rage, because now it was useless. He knew his name. He knew "Harriet" and "David" and did not care about his brothers and sisters who wished he was dead.

He did not remember when he was born.

Listening, as he did, to every sound, he heard how the noises in that office were suddenly louder, because in a line of people waiting outside one of the glass panels, a woman had begun shouting at the clerk who was interviewing her, and because of this anger released into the air, all the lines began moving and shuffling, and other people were muttering, and then said aloud, like a barking, short angry words like Bastards, Shits—and these were words that Ben knew very well, and he was afraid of them. He felt the cold of fear moving down from the back of his neck to his spine.

The man behind him was impatient, and said, "I haven't got all day if you have."

"When were you born? What date?"

"I don't know," said Ben.

And now the clerk put an end to it, postponing the problem, with, "Go and find your birth certificate. Go to the Records Office. That'll settle it. You don't know your last employer. You don't have an address. You don't know your date of birth."

With these words his eyes left Ben's face, and he nodded at the man behind to come forward, displacing Ben, who went straight out of that office, feeling as if all the hairs of his body, the hairs on his head, were standing straight up, he was so trapped and afraid. Outside was a pavement, with people, a little street, full of cars, and under the plane tree where the pigeons were moving about, cooing and complacent, a bench. He sat on it at the other end from a young woman who gave him a glance, but then another, frowned, and went off, looking back at him with *that* look on her face which Ben knew and expected. She was not afraid of him, but thought that she might be soon. Her body was all haste and apprehension, like one escaping. She went into a shop, glancing back.

Ben was hungry. He had no money. There were some broken crusts on the ground, left for the pigeons. He gathered them up hastily, looking about him: he had been scolded for this before. Now an old man came to sit on the bench, and he gave Ben a long stare, but decided not to bother with what his instincts were telling him. He closed his eyes. The sun made a tiny bloom of sweat on the old face. Ben sat on, thinking how he must go back to the old woman, but she would be disappointed in him. She had told him to come to this office and claim unemployment

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benefit. The thought of her made him smile—a very different grin from the one that had annoyed the clerk. He sat smiling, a small smile that showed a gleam of teeth in his beard, and watched how the old man woke up, to wipe away the sweat that was running down his face, saying to the sweat, "What? What's that?" as if it had reminded him of something. And then, to cover himself, he said sharply to Ben, "What do you think you're laughing at?"

Ben left the bench and the shade of the tree and the companionship of the pigeons, and walked through streets knowing he was going the right way, for about two miles. Now he was nearing a group of big blocks of flats. He went direct to one of them, and inside it, saw the lift come running down towards him, hissing and bumping, tried to make himself enter it, but his fear of lifts took him to the stairs. One, two, three. . .eleven flights of grey cold stairs, listening to the lift grumble and crash on the other side of a wall. On the landing were four doors. He went straight to one from where a rich meaty smell was coming, making his mouth fill with water. He turned the door knob, rattled it, and stood back to stare expectantly at the door, which opened. And there an old woman stood, smiling. "Oh, Ben, there you are," she said, and put her arm around him to pull him into the room. Inside he stood slightly crouched, darting looks everywhere, first of all to a large tabby cat that sat on a chair arm. Its fur was standing on end. The old woman went to it, and said, "There, there, it's all right, puss," and under her calming hand its terror abated, and it became a small neat cat. Now the old woman went to Ben, with the same words, "There, Ben, it's all right, come and sit down." Ben allowed his eyes to leave puss, but did not lose his wariness, sending glances in her direction.

This room was where the old woman had her life. On a gas stove was a saucepan of meat stew, and it was this that Ben had smelled on the landing. "It's all right, Ben," she said again, and ladled stew into two bowls, put hunks of bread beside one, for Ben, set her own opposite him, and then spooned out a portion into a saucer for the cat, which she put on the floor by the chair. But the cat wasn't taking any chances: it sat quiet, its eyes fixed on Ben.

Ben sat down, and his hands were already about to dig into the mound of meat, when he saw the old woman shake her head at him. He picked up a spoon and used it, conscious of every movement, being careful, eating tidily, though it was evident he was very hungry. The old woman ate a little, but mostly watched him, and when he had finished, she scraped out from the saucepan everything that was left of the stew, and put it on his plate.

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"I wasn't expecting you," she said, meaning that she would have made more. "Fill up on bread."

Ben finished the stew, and then the bread. There was nothing else to eat except some cake, which she pushed towards him, but he ignored it.

Now his attention was free, and she said, slowly, carefully, as if to a child, "Ben, did you go to the office?" She had told him how to get there.

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"They said, 'How old are you?'"

Here the old woman sighed, and put her hand to her face, rubbing it around there, as if wiping away difficult thoughts. She knew Ben was eighteen: he kept saying so. She believed him. It was the one fact he kept repeating. But she knew that was no eighteen-year-old, sitting there in front of her, and she had decided not to go on with the thoughts of what that meant. *It's not my business—what he really is*, sums up what she felt. *Deep waters! Trouble! Keep out!*

He sat there like a dog expecting a rebuke, his teeth revealed in that other grin, which she knew and understood now, a stretched, teeth-showing grin that meant fear.

"Ben, you must go back to your mother and ask her for your birth certificate. She'll have it, I'm sure. It'd save you all the complications and the questions. You do remember how to get there?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, I think you should go soon. Perhaps tomorrow?"

Ben's eyes did not leave her face, taking in every little movement of eyes, mouth, her smile, her insistence. It was not the first time she had told him to go home to find his mother. He did not want to. But if *she* said he must. . . .For him what was difficult was this: here there was friendship for him, warmth, kindness, and here, too, insistence that he must expose himself to pain and confusion, and danger. Ben's eyes did not leave that face, that smiling face, for him at this moment the bewildering face of the world.

"You see, Ben, I have to live on my pension. I have only so much money to live on. I want to help you. But if you got some money—that office would give you money—and that would help me. Do you understand, Ben?" Yes, he did. He knew money. He had learned that hard lesson. Without money you did not eat.

And now, as if it was no great thing she wanted him to do, just a little thing, she said, "Good, then that is settled."

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She got up. "Look, I've got something I think would be just right for you."

Folded over a chair was a jacket, which she had found in a charity shop, searching until there was one with wide shoulders. The jacket Ben had on was dirty, and torn, too.

He took it off. The jacket she had found fitted his big shoulders and chest but was loose around the waist. "Look, you can pull it in." There was a belt, which she adjusted. And there were trousers, too. "And now I want you to have a bath, Ben."

He took off the new jacket and his trousers, obedient, watching her all the time.

"I'm going to throw away these trousers, Ben." She did so. "And I have got new underpants, and vests."

He was standing naked there, watching, while she went next door to a little bathroom. His nostrils flared, taking in the smell of water. Waiting, he checked all the smells in the room, the fading aromas of the good stew, a warm friendly smell; the bread, which smelled like a person; then a rank wild smell—the cat, still watching him; the smell of a slept-in bed, where the covers had been pulled up covering the pillows, which had a different smell. And he listened, too. The lift was silent, behind two walls. There was a rumbling in the sky, but he knew airplanes, was not afraid of them. The traffic down there he did not hear at all—he had shut it out of his awareness.

The old woman came back, and said, "Now, Ben." He followed her, clambered into the water, and crouched in it. "Do sit down," she said. He hated the submission to the dangerous slipperiness, but now he was sitting in hot water to his waist. He shut his eyes, and with his teeth bared, this time in a grin of resignation, he let her wash him. He knew this washing was something he had to do, from time to time. It was expected of him. In fact he was beginning to enjoy water.

Now the old woman, Ben's eyes no longer fastened on her face, allowed herself to show the curiosity she felt, which could never be assuaged—or indulged in.

Under her hands was a strong broad back, with fringes of brown hair on either side of the backbone, and on the shoulders a mat of wet fur: it felt like that, as if she were washing a dog. On the upper arms there was hair, but not so much, not more than could be on an ordinary man. His chest was hairy, but it wasn't like fur, it was a man's chest. She handed him the soap but he let it slide into the water, and dug around furiously for it. She found it, and lathered him vigorously, and then used a little hand-shower to get it all off. He bounded out of the bath, and

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she made him go back, and she washed his thighs, his backside, and then, his genitals. He had no self-consciousness about these, and so she didn't either. And then, he could get out, which he did laughing, and shaking himself into the towel she held. She enjoyed hearing him laugh: it was like a bark. Long ago she had a dog who barked like that.

She dried him, all over, and then led him back to the other room, naked, and made him put on his new underpants, his new vest, a charity shop shirt, his trousers. Then she put a towel around his shoulders and as he began to jerk about in protest, she said, "Yes, Ben, you have to."

She trimmed his beard first. It was stiff and bristly, but she was able to make a good job of it. And now his hair, and that was a different matter, for it was coarse and thick. The trouble was his double crown which, if cut short, showed like stubbly whorls on the scalp. It was necessity that had left the hair on the top of his head long, and at the sides. She told him that one of these new clever hairdressers would make him look like a film star, but since he did not take this in, she amended it to, "They could make you look so smart, Ben, you'd not know yourself."

But he didn't look too bad now, and he smelled clean.

It was early evening and she did what she would have done alone: she brought out cans of beer from her fridge, filled her glass, and then she filled one for him. They were going to spend the evening doing what he liked best, watching television.

First she found a piece of paper and wrote on it:

Mrs. Ellen Biggs
11 Mimosa House
Halley Street, London SE6.

She said, "Ask your mother for your birth certificate. If she has to send for it, then tell her she can always write to you care of me—and here is the address."

He did not answer: he was frowning.

"Do you understand, Ben?"

"Yes."

She did not know whether he did or not, but thought so.

He was looking at the television. She got up, switched it on, and came back by way of the cat. "There, there puss, it's all right." But the cat never for one moment took its eyes off Ben.

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And now it was an easy pleasant evening. He did not seem to mind what he saw. Sometimes she switched to another channel, thinking he was bored. He did like wildlife programs, but there wasn't one tonight. This was a good thing, really, because he sometimes got too excited: she knew wild instincts had been aroused. She had understood from the start that he was controlling instincts she could only guess at. Poor Ben—she knew he was that, but not how, or why.

At bedtime she unrolled on to the floor the futon he slept on, and put blankets beside it in case: he usually did not use coverings. The cat, seeing that this enemy was on the floor, leaped up on to the bed and lay close against the old woman's side. From there she could not watch Ben, but it was all right, she felt safe. When the lights were off the room was not really dark, because there was a moon that night.

The old woman listened for Ben's breathing to change into what she called his night breathing. It was, she thought, like listening to a story, events or adventures that possibly the cat would understand. In his sleep Ben ran from enemies, hunted, fought. She knew he was not human: "not one of us" as she put it. Perhaps he was a kind of yeti. When she had seen him first, in a supermarket, he was prowling—there was only that word for it—as he reached out to grab up loaves of bread. She had had a glimpse of him then, the wild man, and she had never forgotten it. He was a controlled explosion of furious needs, hungers, and frustrations, and she knew that even as she said to the attendant, "It's all right, he is with me." She handed him a pie she had just bought for her lunch, and he was eating it as she led him out of the place. She took him home, and fed him. She washed him, though he had protested that first time. She saw how he reacted to some cold meat—quite alarming it was; but she bought extra meat for him. It was just here where he was most different; meat, he could not get enough. And she was an old woman, eating a little bit of this here, a snack there—an apple, cheese, cake, a sandwich. The stew that day had been just luck: she ate that kind of meal so seldom.

One night, when the three of them had gone to bed, and to sleep, she had woken because of a pressure along her legs. Ben had crept up and laid himself down, his head near her feet, his legs bent. It was the cat's distress that had woken her. But Ben was asleep. It was how a dog lays itself down, close, for company, and her heart ached, knowing his loneliness. In the morning he woke embarrassed. He seemed to think he had done wrong, but she said, "It's all right, Ben. There's plenty of room." It was a big bed, the one she had had when she was married.

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She thought that he was like an intelligent dog, always trying to anticipate wants and commands. Not like a cat at all: that was a different kind of sensitivity. And he was not like a monkey, for he was slow and heavy. Not like anything she had known. He was Ben, he *was himself—whatever that was. She was pleased he was going to find* his family. He was hardly communicative, but she had gathered it was a well-off family. And there was his accent which was not what you'd expect, from how he looked. He seemed to like his mother. If she herself could be good to Ben—so Ellen Biggs saw it—then his family could too. But if it didn't work, and he turned up here again, then she would go with him to the Public Records Office and find out about his age. She was so confused about this she had given up trying to puzzle it out. He repeated that he was eighteen, and she had to believe him. In many ways he was childish, and yet when she took a good look at that face she could even think him middle-aged, with those lines around his eyes. Little ones, but still: no eighteen-year-old could have them. She had actually gone so far in her thoughts to wonder if the people he belonged to, whoever they were, matured early, in which case they would die young, according to our ideas. Middle-aged at twenty, and old at forty, whereas she, Ellen Biggs, was eighty and only just beginning to feel her age to the point that she hoped she would not have to make that annoying journey to the Records Office, and then stand in a line: the thought made her tired and cross. She fell asleep, listening to Ben dream, and woke to find him gone. The paper with her address had gone, and the ten pound note she had left for him. Although she had expected it, now she had to sit down, her hand pressing on a troubled heart. Since he had come into her life, weeks ago, foreboding had come too. Sitting alone when he had gone off somewhere she was thinking, "Where's Ben? What is he doing? Was he being cheated again?" Far too often had she heard from him, "They took my money,"—"They stole everything." The trouble was, information came out of him in a jumble.

"When was that, Ben?"

"It was summer."

"No, I mean, what year?"

"I don't know. It was after the farm."

"And when was that?"

"I was there two winters."

She knew he was about fourteen when he left his family. So what had he been doing for four years?

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His mother had been wrong, thinking he had gone right away. He and his gang of truants from school were camping in an empty house on the edge of their town, and from there made forays, shoplifting, breaking into shops at night, and at weekends went to nearby towns to hang about the streets with the local youths, hoping for a fight and some fun. Ben was their leader because he was so strong, and stood up for them. So they thought, but really the reason was that inwardly he was mature, he was a grown man, more of a parent, whereas they were still children. One by one they were caught, sent to borstal, or returned to parents and school. One evening he was standing on the edge of a crowd of fighting youngsters—he did not fight, he was afraid of his strength, his rage—and he realized he was alone, without companions. For a while he was one of a gang of much older youths, but he did not dominate them as he had the young ones. They forced him to steal for them, made fun of him, jeered at his posh accent. He left them and drifted down to the West Country where he fell in with a motorbike gang, which was engaged in warfare with a rival gang. He longed to drive a motorcycle, but could not get the hang of it. But it was enough to be near them, these machines, he loved them so. The gang used him to guard their bikes when they went into a caff, or a pub. They gave him food, and even a little money sometimes. One night the rival gang found him standing over half a dozen machines, beat him up, twelve to one, and left him bleeding. His own gang returned to find a couple of their machines gone, and were ready to beat him up again but found this apparently slow stupid oaf transformed into a whirling screaming fighting madman. He nearly killed one of them. Setting on him all together they subdued him, no bones broken, but again, he was bleeding and sick. He was taken into a pub by a girl who worked there. She washed him down, sat him in a corner, gave him something to eat, talked him into sense again. He was quiet at last, dazed perhaps.

A man came to him, sat down, and asked if he was looking for work. This was how Ben found himself on the farm. He went with Matthew Grindly because he knew that from now on any member of the two gangs seeing him would summon his mates, and he would be beaten up again.

The farm was well away from any main road, down an overgrown and muddy lane. It was neglected, and so was the house, which was large, and bits of it were shut off where the roof leaked too badly. This farm had been left twenty years before by their father to Mary Grindly, Matthew Grindly, and Ted Grindly. A farm, but no money. They were pretty well self-sufficient, living off their animals, fruit trees, the vegetable garden.

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What fields there were—one after another they had been sold off to neighboring farmers—grew fodder. Once a month, Mary and Matthew—now Mary and Ben—walked into the village three miles off to buy groceries, and liquor for Ted. They walked because their car was rusting in a yard.

When money was needed for food, electricity, rates, Mary said to Matthew, "Take that beast to market and get what you can for it." But bills were ignored for months at a time, and often not paid at all.

This disgraceful place tended to be forgotten by everyone: the locals were part ashamed because of it, and part sorry for the Grindlys. It was known that "the boys"—but they were getting old now—were not far off feeble-minded. They were illiterate, too. Mary had expected to marry, but it had come to nothing. It was she who ran the farm. She told her brothers what to do: mend that fence. . .clean out that byre. . .take the sheep for shearing. . .plant the vegetables. She was at them all day and bitter because she had to be. Then it was Matthew who was doing all the work: Ted was drinking himself to death quietly in his room. He was no trouble, but he couldn't work. Matthew was getting arthritic, and he had chest problems, and soon the hard work was beyond him too. He fed the chickens and looked after the vegetables, but that was about it.

Ben was given a room, with poor furniture in it—very different from the pleasant rooms he had been brought up in. He could eat as much as he wanted. He worked from daylight to dark, every day. He did know that he did most of the work, but not that without him the farm would collapse. This farm, or anything like it, would soon become impossible, when the European Commission issued its diktats, and its spy-eyes circled for ever overhead. The place was a scandal, and a waste of good land. People came tramping along the lane and through the farmyard, hoping to buy it—the telephone had been cut off, for non-payment—and they would be met by Mary, an angry old woman, who told them to go away, and slammed the door in their face.

When on the neighboring farms they were asked about the Grindlys, people tended to equivocate, siding with them against officialdom and the curious. If they lost the farm, what would happen to those poor derelicts, Ted and Matthew? They would find themselves in a Home, that's what. And Mary? No, let the poor things live out their time. And they had that chap there who'd come from somewhere, no one knew where, a kind of yeti he looked like, but he did the work well enough.

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Once, when Ben had gone with Mary to the village to carry groceries back, he was stopped by a man who said to him, "You're with the Grindlys, they say. Are they doing right by you?"

"What do you want?" asked Ben.

"What are they paying you? Not much if I know the Grindlys. I'll make it worth your while to come to me. I'm Tom Wandsworth. . ."—he repeated the name, and then again, ". . .and anyone around here will tell you how to get to my farm. Think about it."

"What did he say?" Mary asked, and Ben told her.

Ben had never been given a pay-book, and terms and conditions of work had not been mentioned. Mary had given him a couple of quid when they went to the village so he could buy toothpaste, that kind of thing. She was impressed that he cared about his personal cleanliness, and liked his clothes neat.

Now she said, "I'm keeping your wages for you, Ben. You know that."

How could he know? This was the first time he had heard about it. Mary believed that he was stupid, like her brothers, but now saw trouble loom.

"You don't want to leave us, Ben," she said. "You'd not do better with anyone else. I've got a good little bit of money put aside for you. You can have it any time."

She pointed to a high-up drawer in her room. Then she fetched a chair, made him stand on it, and held the back steady. There were rolls of notes in the drawer. To Ben it seemed more money than he had imagined possible.

"Is that mine?" he asked.

"Half of it is yours," said Mary.

And when he had gone out of the room, she hid it somewhere else.

It was Mary he did not want to leave, though he was fond of a cow and enjoyed the antics of the pigs. He thought Mary was good to him. She mended his clothes, bought him a new thick jersey for the winter, and gave him plenty of meat to eat. She was never cross with him, as she was with her brothers.

He had a life the others did not guess at. They all went to bed early, with nothing to occupy their minds, and no television: Ted was usually drunk and snoring by nine or ten, and Mary listened to the news on the radio, and went to her room afterwards. Ben slid out over the sill of his window when the house was quiet, and went about the fields and woods, alone and free—himself. He would catch and eat little animals, or a bird. He crouched behind a bush for hours to watch fox

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cubs playing. He sat with his back against a tree trunk and listened to the owls. Or he stood by his favorite cow with his arm around her neck, nuzzling his face into her; and the warmth that came into him from her, and the hot sweet blasts of her breath on his arms and legs when she turned her head to sniff at him meant the safety of kindness. Or he stood leaning on a fence post staring up at the night sky, and on clear nights he sang a little grunting song to the stars, or he danced around, lifting his feet and stamping. Once old Mary thought she heard a noise that needed investigation, went to a window, and caught a glimpse of Ben, and crept down in the dark to watch and listen. It really did make her scalp prickle and her flesh go cold. But why should she care what he did for fun? Without him the animals would be unfed, the cows would stay unmilked, the pigs would have to live in their dirt. Mary Grindly was curious about Ben, but not much. She had had too much trouble in her life to care about other people. Ben's coming to the farm she saw as God's kindness to her.

Then Ted fell down some steps when drunk, and died. Surely Matthew should have been next, the half-crippled coughing man, but it was Mary who had a heart attack. Officials of all kinds suddenly became curious, and one of them, demanding to see accounts, asked Ben questions about himself. Ben was going to say something about the money owed to him, but his instincts shouted at him, *Danger*—and he ran away.

He picked apples on a cider farm, and then he picked raspberries. The other pickers were Poles, mostly students, flown in by a contractor of labor, jolly young people determined to have a good time in spite of the long hours they had to work. Ben was silent and watchful, on his guard. There were caravans to sleep in, but he hated that closeness, and the bad air, and when he had finished eating with them, at night, listening to their songs and their jokes and their laughter, he took a sleeping bag into a wood.

When the picking was finished he had a good bit of money, and he was happy, because he knew that it was having no money that made him helpless. One of the singing and joking young people stole his money from his jacket that was hanging above him on a bush where he lay asleep. Ben made himself go back to the farm, thinking of all that money in the drawer, and half of it belonging to him, but the house was locked, the animals were gone, and there were already nettles growing close up around the house. He did not care about Matthew, who had scarcely spoken to him except for unkind remarks such as when the old dog died—"We don't need another dog, we've got Ben."

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He went home to find his mother but she had moved again. He had to use his wits to find where she was. A house, but nothing like the one he thought of as home. He could not make himself go in, because he saw Paul there, and the rage that was his enemy nearly overcame him.

So he took the old, old road to London, rich London, where surely there must be a little something for him too. There he did find work, was cheated again, lost heart, and Ellen Biggs found him starving in a supermarket.

• • •

ON THE DARK PAVEMENT outside Mimosa House there seemed to be no one about, but Ben knew how at night a shadow could lengthen and become an enemy, and, turning a corner, he nearly ran into a drunk who was lurching about and swearing and muttering. Ben swerved past and ran across empty streets, not bothering about lights. Not until he reached Richmond did he begin using the crossings, telling himself *Go* on green, *Stop* on red. There were people about now, quite a lot. On he went, following instincts that worked well if he didn't confuse them with maps and directions, and then he was in a high street and he was hungry. He went into a café that said "Breakfast All Day," and, as always in a new place, looked hard at faces for that surprised stare that might turn out to be dangerous. But it was too early for people to be noticing much. He was careful to eat his breakfast slowly and attentively, and left the café feeling pleased with himself. Off he went again, and by midday was crossing fields with the sun spreading warmth everywhere. Then he was in a wood. A thrush was riffling about in last year's leaves. He caught it easily, had its feathers off, and ate it in a couple of crunches. The mate came to investigate. The two birds and their hot blood stayed a craving that was always with him and then he went on, fast, though not running because he knew that brought people after him. In a service station he bought a bottle of water and came out of the shop to see a motorbike roaring to a stop. Ben went to it, pulled by his love for the shining, bright, powerful machine. He stood grinning—his little smile of pleasure. The youth on the machine suppressed any doubts he might have had about this odd-looking bearded man, because he recognized a compatriot in his country, a lover like himself, and he said, "Watch it a minute," and went into the shop. When he came out Ben was stroking the handlebars, with a look on his face that compelled this young man who normally would let no one so much as touch his machine, to say, "Get on, then." And Ben leaped up and off they went.

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"Where are you going?"

"This way," Ben shouted into the wind.

The great machine growled and roared and bounded along, they were whisking through the traffic, and Ben was roaring too: it sounded like a song, a shout of triumph, and the youth driving, hearing all this exultation just behind him, laughed and yelled too, and then began singing a real song, which Ben did not know, though he joined in.

Now there was a little town. There the motorbike turned sharply left, and in a moment had left streets behind for country, but Ben was shouting, "Put me down, I'm going wrong."

The youth yelled, "Why didn't you say?" and turned the machine in a dangerous swoop in front of cars and lorries, and they sped back to the town center. "Here?" yelled the youth, and Ben shouted, "Yes."

He was on the pavement in the middle of the town, and the bike was speeding away, and the youth was giving him the thumbs-up.

Ben set his face to where he knew he must go and walked on, thinking of the motorbike, and his teeth were showing white in his beard, from happiness. They had covered a good distance. Ben would reach where he would have to be hours before he had thought; and in fact he was walking into the road he knew so well by mid-afternoon. There was the house, the big wonderful house, with the garden all around it and there. . . .He was looking at windows that had bars on them, and at once a cold but vigorous anger was taking hold of him. Bars: the bars had been for him. He had stood up there shaking those bars with both of his strong fists, and they had not given way at all; only where the bars were set into the walls were bits of paint flaking from all his shaking, showing how little use his strength was. But the anger he felt now was being driven away by a stronger need, pulling him towards the house. His mother, he wanted to see his mother. Because of the kindness of that old lady, he had remembered that other kindness, and understood that that was what it had been: she, like the old lady, had not hurt him, she had come to rescue him from *that place*. . . .And out of the front door came small children, running. He did not know them, and thought, "Of course, they've moved." His mother wouldn't be here now. He turned away from the house, his home, and began walking this way and that through the streets, like a dog nosing for a scent, but it was not a scent he was after; he had actually seen the other house, the one the family had moved to. . .but wait, there had been another house, after that, and it was the address of that house his mother had put on the big card. It was that house he was moving towards, but it was not what he needed. He had never been to the house where they lived now. He had no way of

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finding it: he did not have in his mind a pattern of streets, smells, bushes, gates. What now? A desperation like a howl made his chest hurt, and then he thought, "Wait, the park, that's where she'll be." And he went to the little park where he had played so often with his brothers and sisters. Or rather, where he had watched them play, because they complained he was rough. When he played it had been by himself, or with his mother.

There was a bench he knew well. His mother loved that park, and that bench, and she would sometimes sit there all afternoon. But the bench was empty. Ben understood one thing, that if he walked about a place for too long people would start noticing him. He did walk about for as long as he dared, glancing into people's faces for "the look," and then sat on a bench from where he could see *the* bench, which he thought of as his mother's. He waited. He was hungry again. He left the park to find the little café he had used with his gang of mates, the gang he had bossed and led, but the café had gone. He bought a meat sandwich from a machine, and returned to the park, and there he saw her, he saw his mother, sitting with a book in her hand. Her shadow lay across grass almost to where he stood. He was repeating in his mind all the things he must ask her, her new address, his exact age, his birth date, did she have his birth certificate? A loving happiness was filling him like sunlight, and then, ready with his questions, ready to greet her, he saw coming towards her across the park grass—Paul; it was Paul, the brother he had hated so terribly that thoughts of killing him once and for ever had filled hours of his childhood. There he was, a tall, rather weedy young man, with long arms and bony hands, and his eyes—but Ben knew those eyes without having to see them: large, hazy blue eyes. Paul was smiling at his mother. She patted the bench beside her and Paul sat down, and the mother took Paul's hand and held it. A rage so terrible that Ben's eyes darkened and seemed to bleed was shaking him. He wanted to push him down and. . . .There was one thing he knew, and he knew it very well, because of so many bad things. . . .There were certain feelings he had that were not allowed. Until this rage, this hate, left him alone he could not go anywhere near his mother, near his brother, Paul. But the feelings were getting worse, he could hardly breathe, and through a red glare he watched his mother and that tormentor, that impostor who had always stood between him and his mother, get up and walk away together. Ben followed, but at a good distance. His rage now was being used up by a determination not to be seen. He did not crouch: that was for forests or woods, and he stood upright and walked quietly, well behind the two he followed. Then, there was a house, a rather bigger one than the one they had moved into first, in a garden,

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and he saw them open a gate, let it swing back, and go together into the house.

Ben was working things out. The house his mother had moved into away from the big house was small. He remembered her saying, "Big enough for me and Paul." Which he had understood as *But not big enough for you too*. If she had moved again, and to a bigger house, then that meant the others were there? Or some of them? He knew that they were all grown-up, but what he remembered was the family growing—children growing. In his mind was that other house, crammed with children, and with people. There wouldn't be room for a lot of people in this house. . . .He had to simmer down, become calm, lose the need to kill: he walked off around the block, came back, walked about some more, returned, and the front of this new house seemed as blank as an unfriendly face. Then he saw his father walk fast along the pavement. He could have seen Ben by raising his eyes, but he was frowning, preoccupied, and did not look up. Ben knew he could not loiter there for much longer. People noticed, they were always on the watch, even when you thought you saw only blank walls and windows, there were eyes when you did not expect them. He walked around the block again and this time saw Luke going into the house. With him was a small child: the idea that Luke was a father was too much to take in. He was thinking that the family were here, together—his family. He could go in and say, "Here I am." And then? He knew they had split up because of him, they quarrelled about him. Only his mother had stood by him. She had come to *that place* where they kept hoses of freezing water coming at him and had taken him home. . . .But the others had wanted him to stay there, wanted him dead.

It was getting dark. The street lights were out. Friendly night was here. But at night you did not linger too long on a pavement outside a house. He walked past the house, whose lights softly shone at him, *Come in*, and walked back again. He could hear the sounds that meant television. He could go in and sit down and watch the TV with them. And as he thought this he clearly saw how Paul would scream that he could not stay in the same room with him, he saw his father's cold face that always seemed to be turned away from him, Ben. Suppose he just went in and said to his mother, "Please give me my birth certificate. Just give it to me and I'll go away." But the rage was pumping up inside him, because all he could see was Paul, who hated him so much. The anger was making his fingers twist and curl; the need to be around that thin neck that would break and crack. . . .

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He walked away from his family, left them for ever, and the pain he felt cooled his anger. He felt wet damping his beard, and then running through it on his chin. He was so hungry again. He must be careful: night people were different from in the day. Better not risk sitting down at a table. . . .He went to a McDonald's, bought a fat juicy lump of meat, threw away the salad and the bun, and ate quickly as he walked. Then he was out of the town, and his face was set for London, for the old woman. He had four pounds left and it was not likely he would have luck again with a motorbike. He was so sad, so lonely, but the dark was his home, night was his place, and people did not look at you so dangerously at night—not, that is, if you weren't in the same room with them. Now he was on a country road, and the sky over him was blurred and soft with stars that had thin cloud running across them. Near him was a little clump of trees, not a wood, but enough to shelter him. He found a bush, settled himself in it, and slept. Once he woke to hear a hedgehog puffing and snuffling near his feet. He could catch it as he sat. What stopped him was not the fear of the prickles in his palms, but a knowledge of prickles on his tongue: you could not bite into a hedgehog as you would a bird. He woke with the first cool breath of dawn. No birds: this was only a thin straggle of trees, and he could see that the houses began quite soon, he could hear traffic. He would reach his part of London about midday. Ahead were hours of his careful, wary walking—and his stomach, oh his stomach, how it begged for food. His hunger hurt and threatened him. It was not an easy hunger: the thin taste of bread or a bun could not satisfy it. It was a need for meat, and he smelled the rawness of blood, the reek of it: yet this hunger was dangerous to him. Sometimes, when he had gone into a butcher's shop, pulled there by the smell, his body had seemed to engorge with wanting, and his arms stretched out of their own accord towards the meat. Once he had grabbed up a handful of chops, and stood gnawing them, the butcher's back being turned, and then the sounds of crunching had made the man whip around—but Ben had run, run—and after that he did not go into these shops. Now he was thinking as he walked of how he could get his hands on meat without spending the four pounds.

His feet were taking him to—he stood outside the tall wire of a building site, looking down into the scene of piled wet earth, machines, men in hard hats. He had worked there for some days, taken on because of those shoulders and arms that could support girders and beams needing two or three men to lift them. The others had stood watching as he shoved and shouldered and lifted. He had wanted to join with them, their jokes, their talk, but did not know how to. He had

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never understood, for example, why the way he spoke was funnier than the way they did. Their eyes when they looked at him had been grave, wary. At the end of a week, pay day. These were all men working illegally for one reason or another, and they were paid less than half the union rate. But Ben had earned enough money to take to the old woman, and she had been pleased with him. Two more weeks. . .and a new man had arrived on the job and from the first he had needled Ben, taunted him, grunted and growled. Ben had not at first known that these were meant to be his sounds, nor had he at once understood when the man had pushed and jostled him, once dangerously, when Ben was standing high, streets far below, his feet straddled from beam to beam over space. The foreman had sharply intervened, but after that Ben had kept an eye on this youth, a grinning, careless, show-off redhead, and had tried to keep out of his way. Another week. The money had been paid out inside a little shelter the men used for moments of rest, or when it was raining too badly. He and the redhead had been last in the line to be paid, and this was how his enemy had planned it, for when Ben's envelope was put into his hand, the young man had grabbed it from him and run off, grunting and scratching himself and crouching low and bounding up, and then again: Ben had known this was meant to be a monkey. He had visited the zoo, moving from cage to cage looking at beasts whose names he had been called, ape, baboon, pig-man, pongo, yeti. There was no yeti in the zoo, nor a pongo either, and he had wondered about them, for he knew he was looking for something like himself.

He had looked helplessly at the foreman, hoping he would protect him, and had seen him grinning, and had seen on the faces of the men standing about, their envelopes in their hands, that look, that grin. He had known he would not get help from them. He had worked a full week for nothing. He had been so full of murder that he had had to walk away from it, and had heard the foreman call after him. "If you're here on Monday, there'll be something for you." Meaning, not money, but work for those great shoulders of his that had saved them, the others, so much effort. And he was back on Monday, at first looking down into the site, hands on the wire, as if he had been inside it and not out, as if it were a cage, and down there were the men he had worked with, but the redhead had not been there. That was because he had grabbed Ben's money and was afraid to come back. Ben had worked that week slowly, carefully, watching faces, watching eyes, moving out of their way, or positioning himself to take the big weights that were easy for him and not for them. And then, at the end of the week in his envelope had been half the money that was due him. He knew that was half what proper builders got, real

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workmen, who were not working illegally; but that half was now half again. The foreman had stared him out. It was not the usual foreman, who was sick: this man had come the day before yesterday off another job, to fill in. The men had stood around, watching, their faces kept expressionless. They had been expecting him to complain, make a fuss, even start a fight; they had had their eyes on his big arms and fists. But Ben knew better: he would get the worst of it. He had looked carefully around, from face to face, and had seen them waiting, and had seen, too, that one at least was sorry for him. This man had said something in a low voice to the new foreman, who had simply turned his back and walked away—with the money due to Ben in his own pocket.

On this site, at this place, Ben was owed forty pounds. Yes, the real foreman was there. He was standing a little apart from the others, who were uncoiling cable off a big spool. Ben went down. He saw that first one, and then another, of the men saw him and stopped. The one who had spoken up for him said something to the foreman. What Ben wanted was for that money simply to be given to him and then he could run—he was afraid of these men. Any single one of them he could knock down with a jerk of his elbow, a slap of his hand, but they could all set on him, and that was what made him shiver a little as he stood there. His hair was standing up all over his body. The foreman stood, thinking, then turned half away, pulled out a wad of money, counted some out, gave Ben twenty. And now they all looked to see what he would do, but he did nothing, only walked away. Yet it was here that he had earned money, and had hoped he would again. If he did work here he could expect one or all of them to take his money, and the foreman to cheat him. He turned at the foot of the path up out of the site and saw them uncoiling the cable, still watching him. Up he went, out of their way. He went to Mimosa House. The lift was silent, because it was out of order. Ben went bounding up the stairs, full of happiness because of seeing the old woman. But when he knocked on the door, there was no reply.

A woman opened her door across the landing, and said, "She's gone to the doctor." She had the key to the flat, Ben knew that. She and the old woman were friends, and she had often seen Ben going in or out. Now she opened the door for Ben, saying, "She'll be back soon. There's no saying how long she'll have to wait. She's poorly. I told her she had to get to the doctor."

Inside, the usually tidy room was disordered. For one thing, the bed had just been pulled up hastily. On it the cat started from sleep, its fur high. Ben did not rummage in the fridge: he hated the cold taste of food

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just taken out of it, and, too, he did not want to use the old woman's food. He squatted on the bed, ignoring the cat, and looked out. He was waiting for a pigeon to come to the balcony. They often did. The cat turned its head to watch too. A yard apart, not looking at each other, they were united in waiting for whatever might come. The door to the balcony was not locked. Ben set it ajar. It bisected the tiny balcony. Then neither Ben nor the cat moved. At last a pigeon came, but to the wrong part, safe behind the door, and then, soon after, another, to the part where. . . .Ben had leaped out, and the bird was in his hand. He was tearing off feathers when he heard the cat's sound, which it always made when a bird was out there, or on the railing, a rusty, hungry noise. Ben ripped some flesh off the bird and flung it down. The cat crept out and ate. The blood was dripping from their mouths. Then there were only feathers blowing about, and some blood stains. The cat went back in. So did Ben. It was not enough, those few mouthfuls of flesh, but it was something, his stomach was appeased. He saw the cat's eyes closing: it was trusting him enough to sleep. Ben curled up on the bed beside the cat, and when Mrs. Biggs came in, towards evening, the two creatures were sleeping side by side on her bed.

She took it all in, some feathers clinging to the blood clots on the balcony, the stale smell of blood, that there were only a few inches between Ben's back and the cat's. She wasn't well. She felt bad. Her heart hurt. And she was tired: at the end of a long wait at the doctor's, among grumbling people, she had been given some pills. But what had she been expecting?—she scolded herself—a cure? She set packages down on the table, untied a scarf from her head, drank water from the tap, and then stood for a while looking down at her old big bed—at the cat, at Ben. She lay down along its edge, and watched the shadows come on the ceiling, and then it was dark. Ben slept his noisy, unhappy sleep. The cat was as neat and quiet as—a cat. The old woman dozed off, feeling her heart beat painfully in her side. She woke because Ben was awake, and pressing his back against her.

"Ben," she said, into the dark. "I'm not well. I'm going to bed for a day or two to rest up." He made a sound that meant, "I am listening." "Did you get the certificate?" A silence from Ben, and something like a whimper. "Did you see your mother?"

"I saw her. In the park."

She already knew the answer but asked. "Did you speak to her?" Ben moved against her side, and whimpered again. "I don't know what to suggest next, Ben. I'd go with you to the place—you know, I told you about, where you get certificates, but I'm not well."

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"I've got some money. I've got twenty pounds."

"That's not going to get you far, Ben." He had known she would say that, and he agreed with her.

"I'll get some money."

She did not ask how. She had been told the story of the building site, how he had been cheated. He would always be cheated, poor Ben, she knew that. And so did he.

When morning came she did not get off the bed, but lay there, breathing slowly and carefully. She said, "Ben, I want you to go to the bathroom, take off your clothes and wash yourself. You don't smell good."

Ben did as she said. He had not washed himself in this thorough way before, but he remembered what she did, and did the same. But now he had to put on the dirty clothes.

She said, "Find your old clothes. They're in that cupboard. Take your new clothes to the launderette, and when you come back here you can put them on again."

He knew about the launderette. "How do I get back in again, if you are in bed?"

"The key's on the table. And get some bread and something for you. And be careful, Ben."

He knew that meant "Don't steal, don't let yourself be carried off into a rage, be on guard."

He did everything as she would have wanted. Then he went to a little shop and bought bread for her—the pale yeasty smell always made him feel a little nauseous—and some meat for himself, and, too, a tin of cat food. All this he did successfully, and let himself back in, and put on his clean clothes. It was midmorning.

Mrs. Biggs was sitting at the table, her hand at her side.

"Make me a cup of tea, Ben."

He did so.

"And give the cat something."

He opened the tin he had bought for the cat, and watched it crouch down to eat.

"You're a good boy, Ben," she said, and tears came into his eyes and she heard him give a sort of bark, which meant he wanted to say thank you to her, expressing his love and gratitude for those words, but he had never heard them, except from her. She almost put out her hand to stroke him as if he were a dog, but he was not a dog, not of that tribe.

She drank her tea, asked for some toast, and lay down again. She slept, the cat by her. There was Ben, in his clean clothes, full of energy and something like happiness because of that loving "You're a good

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boy." He did not want to sleep, but lay on his futon and dozed, hoping she would wake, but she slept all night, and woke in the morning early. Again she asked for this and that, tea, an apple, food for the cat in its saucer. The neighbor came in, saw Ben there, carrying cups and plates into the kitchen, and was pleased for she had defended Ben to the other people on the landing, or who had seen him on the stairs. Now she could say that Ben was looking after Mrs. Biggs.

There was a little conference by the bed. The old woman not wanting to get up was a new thing, which the neighbor understood very well, but who was going to look after her? Mrs. Biggs asked her to get her pension, for she felt too poorly and—she was apologetic—empty the cat's dirt box. Both women understood that Ben could not do this: the mere idea of it—impossible. Even though the cat's fur was quiet, and she no longer sat with her eyes fixed on Ben. When the neighbor returned with Mrs. Biggs's pension she laid the money on the table, and said, looking at Ben: "That's not enough for more than her and the cat."

"He's been using his money to buy me things," said the old woman, but they all knew what the situation was.

"That's all right then," said the neighbor, and went off to spread the news that the yeti was looking after Mrs. Biggs as if he were her son.

And so that time went, a happy time, the best in Ben's whole life, looking after the old woman, even taking her clothes and her bedclothes to the launderette, cooking up dishes from frozen to feed her—but he usually finished them, for she ate so little. But it could not last, because all this time the money was going, going, and he soon had none left. If he wanted to stay there, with Mrs. Biggs and the cat, then he would have to get more money and he did not know how. The neighbor, bringing in the pension money, carefully did not look at Ben, and he knew it was a criticism. The old woman did not criticize him, but lay and dozed, or sat and dozed, her hand so often pressing on her heart, saying, "Ben, we could both do with a cup of tea, I am sure."

He was hungry, for he was trying to eat as little as he could. It could not go on. He told her he was going to see about a job, and saw her sad little smile. "Be careful, Ben," she said. And Ben left: he had no home in this world.

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ADAM MICHNIK

Gogol's Venom: A Study in Lost Illusions

When in 1982 Jan Kott wrote an essay entitled "On Venom," he dedicated it to the memory of Adam Wazyk, and noted: "A snake bite disables the mind. Inside a magic circle, the mind moves in a fictitious world, believes in lies, and cannot distinguish reality from illusion." He went on to say that intellectuals' involvement in communism went from joining the movement to leaving it—in disappointment and disillusion—and that "the moment of disillusion is perhaps the most important."

Jan Kott's own writings bear him out, when one looks at successive versions of his texts that were first published in journals, then in book form, and then in later editions of these books. Kott changed his texts, gave them new meanings and significance, got his dates wrong, his names mixed up; and he made up quotations. Thus, one could conclude that Kott didn't tell the truth. But, as Czeslaw Milosz wondered when analyzing the captive mind, is the truth to be found in thoughts on "Hegelian venom"? It certainly describes the path taken by Tadeusz Kronski, the Hegelian philosopher and patron of the Warsaw school of the history of ideas, and by Kolakowski, Baczko, and Beylin. Wazyk, however, did not mention Hegel—he used the term "a lunatic asylum."

Sometimes I think that the people demanding Kott's head have a point. Undoubtedly, he was a communist, and an intelligent one at that. He wrote extremely well and helped shape public opinion. He was able to persuade his readers while wounding his adversaries. This should be enough for our would-be lustrators and decommunizers. But could he have made Hegelian venom the main ingredient of his life? After all, his books don't indicate that he ever read Hegel.

When you consider the increasingly oppressive climate of the 1930s—Poland caught between Hitler on one side and Stalin on the other, the grotesque and brutal regime of the Sanacja colonels under attack from the National Democrats, discrimination against Jews in the universities, thugs from the extreme-right National Radical Camp with their knuckle-dusters—is it surprising that a young intellectual from a family of Polonized Jews should be attracted to the left?

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At that time, when the predictions of Nietzsche and Marx came true, when God seemed to have died, when Revolution was knocking at the door, was it surprising that young people were looking for a remedy? "Demoliberalism"—the contemptuous name given to parliamentary rule and respect for human rights—was on the defensive, the norms of bourgeois democracy and morality were subjected to merciless ridicule at political rallies and in literary cabarets. Totalitarian ideologies were triumphant. The younger generation was fascinated either by Hitler and Mussolini, or by Stalin and communism. Does this mean Jan Kott was a communist? I don't think so.

He was a neophyte. He wrote that he acquired the status and character of a neophyte when he was baptized. But in the 1930s, baptism was no longer enough. The "real Poles" from the National Democratic press liked to check people's birth certificates, and they checked Kott's. But with his mischievous and restless disposition, he sought salvation in a world marked by an all-pervading sense of impending catastrophe. He presented papers full of left-wing ideas at meetings of the university Polonist Circle; he was fascinated by the Spanish Civil War; he read the novels of André Malraux and then went to stay in a Dominican monastery in the south of France, where he meditated on the mysteries of Catholic belief while studying Jacques Maritain and other Thomists. He went on to seek spiritual sustenance in surrealist poetry and the manifestos of André Breton. What was he searching for?

More than once, Kott describes a drunken party taking place after the curfew in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Kott enters a room, where he sees two people, Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czeslaw Milosz, on their knees making faces at each other.

> They were making the most horrible faces at one another. Like Syfon and Mietus in Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke*. They banged their heads on the floor and then, one, two, three, they raised their heads and made faces. Private and public faces, innocent and obscene faces, military and civilian faces, the faces of virgins and pederasts, and great historical faces—Beck, Hitler, Stalin. They made the faces of the archetypal father and king. Perhaps Czeslaw's last face was Almighty God, after which Jerzy collapsed on the floor. Who or what were they bowing to? To the prewar years or to what lay ahead?

Kott was impressed that Milosz found the face Kott had been looking for in the Thomists and the surrealists, in secular humanism and

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Marxism—a face with which to confront a world of nihilism and cruelty, a world of round-ups and summary executions. He considered Jerzy Stempowski and Stefan Zolkiewski his masters, but he followed in the footsteps of Boy and Slonimski. From them, he inherited his brilliant journalistic style, the mordant wit of his theater reviews, the subtlety and grace of his conversation—and the seeming superficiality of his observations. This superficiality was a kind of mask, a stylistic stratagem. Kott's writing always had several levels: he wrote for the authorities, for his readers, and for his friends. He also wrote for himself, and at this level dealt with what was most essential and personal, which he carefully camouflaged—not only out of fear of Hitler and Stalin, but of himself.

Jan Kott dreamed of writing a great novel that would register the enormity and horror of the human condition in the twentieth century—a sociological construction of man's fate. But man's fate is not a sociological construct: neither Balzac's Rastignac nor Stendhal's Julien Sorel was a hero typical of his time. As a critic, Kott demanded the typical, but he was fascinated by what was unique and nonstandardized in human beings. He once wrote: "Some life stories belong not just to literary history but to literature itself. . . .[They] are imbued with existential experience and demonstrate the boundaries where literature ends and the zone of silence begins." He went on to add:

> There are years and places. . .in which history demonstrates its horror and destructive force with exceptional clarity. These are chosen countries in the same sense that the Bible refers to the Jews as a chosen people. In these places and in these times, history is "let off the chain." The fate of individuals seems to be directly overwhelmed by history.

Kott's books constitute a series of volumes of a twentieth-century *Human Comedy*. The structure of his life story is a transcription over time of the hero-narrator's internal monologue. The hero appears in various incarnations. He is a budding writer, fascinated by Thomism and surrealism. He studies Maritain and Breton and explores the novels of Malraux. He witnesses the Soviet occupation of Lvov and the Nazi occupation of Warsaw. He is a Jew in hiding who miraculously escapes death. He is a member of the underground Communist party and a fighter in the partisans. He subsequently becomes an aggressive Communist and a rabid columnist for *Kuznica*, demanding the settling of accounts and revolutionary transformation, a disciple of Voltaire with a party card, an inveterate womanizer, a mendacious witness of the

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period, repeating the stilted phrases of official propaganda. Our hero becomes a critic and a rebel, a star attraction in literary salons and at theatrical opening nights, a bitingly witty polemicist, whose work is tolerated and confiscated in turn. Finally, he becomes an émigré. All of this is recorded day by day—a tale to rival *Wilhelm Meister's Travels*, as well as *The Confessions of a Child of the Century*. Without Kott's writings it would be difficult to understand the bitter taste of this era, its fascination and its horror, its hopes and fears. But we need to remember that they constitute a literary fiction, so that it makes no sense to check quotations, dates, or names, to look for precision in the details or to correct errors of fact. Kott's "human comedy" is a creation of his imagination.

Kott wrote more modestly about himself and his colleagues at *Kuznica*. In March 1945 he proclaimed in this aggressive Marxist weekly,

> History has become a public matter. History is taking place before our eyes! The hierarchy of events is now visible. The great issues of the Third Independent Republic must find expression in literature. From Lodz and Krakow we must follow and transmit to our readers the struggle that is being waged in the countryside, at the front, in Warsaw. We must depict the mainstream of history.

To be in the mainstream was Julien Sorel's dream. It was the dream of people who felt unsure of their position when the old regime was decaying and when Napoleon and other outsiders were making spectacular careers. The life stories of these people—although each was different—came to constitute *A Study of Customs of the Era*. Their morals were appropriate to a period of massive upheavals. People who had been marginalized and hunted as criminals, stalked like animals, now landed on Mount Parnassus. They took revenge for years of degradation and humiliation. They repeated the prayer of Daniel Defoe: "May the Lord keep me from hunger, that I may not steal." They dreamed the dream of Julien Sorel, who knew that "one must know how to wear the uniform of one's era" and that "only the strong and the cunning are victorious." The hero of Kott's "human comedy" is not, however, "a common *arriviste* and small-time rascal." He wanted, like Voltaire, to wage war on "ignorance, fanaticism, and obscurantism," to battle against slavery and the Inquisition, against syphilis and the extortion of the tax collectors, against the military dictatorship of the Jesuits in Paraguay and the absolutist rulers of German principalities. Like Diderot, he was excited by politics, even when writing about literature or

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eroticism. "He was not afraid of being biased, because there were good reasons to be biased." But his "exceptional charm" lay in his deeply concealed self-irony. In July 1945, he already liked to quote d'Alembert's pre-Revolutionary comment: "Let's talk about the elephant, because it is the only large creature we can safely talk about." To which he added a quote from Montesquieu: "Despotism is such a dreadful thing that even those who practice it turn against it." After which he went back to unmasking the armed "bandits" of the underground and General Anders, the Catholic Church and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Milosz's view of impending catastrophe, and the concept of honor in Conrad's novels.

Szkola klasykow [*School of the Classics*], published in 1949, announced the arrival of literary realism in "a country building socialism." In this manifesto of impending doom, with its brilliant analyses of Defoe, Swift, and the French socialists, we find the following quotation from Diderot:

> Power acquired by force is nothing more than usurpation; it lasts only as long as he who gives the orders remains stronger than those who receive them. Therefore, if the latter become the stronger and impose the yoke, they will do so in a manner as lawful and just as that in which the yoke was imposed on them.

This was well said, but it was just an aside. The main thread was rejection of "the whole despicable deceit of bourgeois solidarism." And the hero-narrator went on to reject Zeromski and Wyspianski, Sienkiewicz and Conrad. His arguments were often threatening in tone. This was, after all, a time when "it was possible to destroy someone with a single joke and kill him with a single denunciation." He was often a great actor in a terrible play. He behaved as if he were living at a time when "Alaric entered Rome, when the cultural values of the intelligentsia lay in ruins." He was the gravedigger of the old era and the herald of the new. He drowned out the horror of the new era with such phrases as: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs," or "You can't make a revolution and keep your hands clean." One of his friends simply commented, "Janek always blathers on until late at night."

Where did this blathering come from? In 1956 Kott wrote: "The occupation taught me the most. . . .The only thing that saved me from succumbing to the horror. . .that helped me resist the nightmare, was the belief that right is on the side of history, that fascism would be crushed and that it would be crushed by the Red Army. . . .When I joined the People's Army, I stopped being afraid." Such was his explanation in the

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spirit of Voltaire, Hegel, and Marx—a eulogy to the rationality of History. There was also a eulogy to the rationality of Geography—the people of the Home Army believed that "liberation would come from the Allies. . . .It seemed to me this was simply a fantasy that people wanted to believe in." Kott, however, knew that "liberation could only come from the other direction." On the other hand, the occupation gave him a fine sense of the absurd, of the perfect nonrationality of human fate, of the Gombrowicz-like contest to make faces at the world. He lived simultaneously in both these worlds—the world of Reason and the world of the Absurd. When was he being sincere? Perhaps all the time.

Kott didn't want to die—that's why he rejected Conrad, his sense of honor and morality, his notion of being true to oneself. He wrote that this was "the heroism of the stupid. The heroism of a donkey pulling a cart across a bridge full of land mines." And he added: "Conrad's version of being true to oneself is that of the slave; a slave is someone who obeys the master he despises, and is concerned only with his own inner rectitude." The loyalty of a ship's captain is simply "blind obedience to the great shipowners of the world." He was sincere when he wrote this. And these were the kind of words needed by the Communist authorities to destroy and defile the Home Army's mythology of resistance, honor, and loyalty. These words were inscribed, then, in the Great Lie of the era about "Home Army counterrevolution." Did he realize he was lying?

Our hero-narrator "is not a trickster. He does not lie intentionally, and he forgets he is lying and is almost ready to believe every one of his words. He's in a fine mood, things are going well with him, people are listening to him, and because of this his tongue unwinds and he chatters away, ever more fluently. He bares his soul, he says what his heart dictates, and lying in all sincerity, he shows himself as he really is. . . ." Thus wrote Gogol, whom Kott cited. It wasn't Hegel who poisoned Kott. He was poisoned by Gogol!

People tried to counter the challenge of totalitarianism with religious faith and hope, with Conrad's principle of honor and loyalty, and also with laughter and the absurd, the grotesque-tragic vision of Witkacy, the wry face of Gombrowicz. One could counter the horror with a total lack of seriousness by donning the mask of Harlequin and playing the fool. Only Harlequin, Kott later remarked, manages to bring together "humor and naïveté, cunning and madness." Was this a "captive mind," a case of reason infected by "Hegelian venom"? Not at all. It was reason gone astray, seeking for a way to adapt. It needed a "face," an expression to mimic that would allow it to survive. The mask of Diderot and the grace of Harlequin, laughter instead of honor, the virtues of the

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Enlightenment rather than the Age of Chivalry. Here is yet another dream—to be the jester of one's times.

The jester, in Kolakowski's classic definition, is someone who moves in elite social circles, but does not himself belong there. He speaks impertinently, and questions everything that is taken for granted. A jester must be drawn from outside the elite, must observe it from the sidelines in order to proclaim the nonobvious of its obviousness and the nonnecessity of its necessity; at the same time, by moving in elite circles he knows its revered leader and has the opportunity to speak to him in an impertinent manner. So, a jester or a drawing-room scandalizer? Sorel or Chlestakov? Harlequin or Diderot? A man of the Enlightenment, a follower of Voltaire, someone who jeers at the world around him.

Kott jeered in masterly fashion. He was often cruel to the journalists on *Tygodnik Powszechny*, who were virtually gagged by the censors during the 1940s: "An independent publication?" he sneered. "Independent of whom? Archbishop Sapiecha and the church hierarchy?" He wrote about Antoni Golubiew: "Talking about a return to the Middle Ages is just a way of putting a pretty face on an attempt to return to a far more recent and uglier age." He praised Stefan Kisielewski's book, *Sprzysiezenie* [*Conspiracy*] in the most backhanded manner: "painstaking observation, a completely secular intellectual climate, a determination to face unpalatable issues, a healthy cynicism—these are the intellectual and artistic predilections of Kisielewski, and I have to say that these are predilections that I share." Nor did Kott spare his colleagues at *Kuznica*: "One reads Dygat's book with pleasure, while one puts it down with a certain unease. One reads Brandys's book with a certain unease, while one puts it down with pleasure, enormous pleasure."

In a report on the Soviet Union (February 1947), full of admiration for the first workers' and peasants' state, Kott recounted an anecdote about some American journalists who were visiting a Moscow school. They came to a math class and asked the students: "If you buy shoes in a store for 200 rubles and you sell them for 350, how much will you get?" The kids start to calculate, and one of them raises his hand: "Two years for speculation" was his answer. Was Kott playing the fool?

Reviewing Ewa Fisher's translation of Nazim Hikmet's fairy tales, Kott wrote: "The translation is as dry as dust, as uneven as a camel's hump, as fuzzy as quince, and as poor as a water-carrier in Istanbul." He said the following about erotic life under Stalin:

> Just last week a friend complained to me that he and his girlfriend, with whom he's been living for a year, only get together twice a

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> week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "What about Wednesdays?" I asked. "Wednesdays are out because she has a youth organization meeting." "Well, what about Friday, Saturday, and Sunday?" "On Fridays," said my friend, "she goes to confession, on Saturdays she repents for her sins, and on Sundays she goes to communion." "You still have Mondays." "No, no, I don't have Mondays. On Mondays, she is firmly resolved to improve the world."

About Slonimski's play, *Samotnosc* [*Loneliness*] (July 1956), Kott wrote, "This is not the debut of an author with something to say. Quite the opposite. This is a play by someone who has nothing to say and no inhibitions whatsoever." And he noted: "For the first time in my life, I whistled during a performance. If a play is a flop, one shouldn't whistle. But if a play is downright disgusting, one ought to whistle. Whistle!" And whistle he did. An angry Colonel Stanislaw Nadzin wrote in a sharp letter that Kott had "incited the audience to hooligan behavior in the theater." Kott replied: "I regret that I started whistling at *Samotnosc*; I should have started whistling seven years ago."

The era of Stalinist orthodoxy came to an end, and somewhere around the end of 1954 the thaw set in. It sprang from the idealization of the purity of the first years of the Revolution, 1944, the political conflicts of the period, the faith and hopes that people nurtured at the time, "the enthusiasm and festering bitterness, caution and recklessness." In a review of a play by Jozef Kusmierek (November 1954), Kott wrote, "Revolutionaries had not yet become mired in paper-work, meetings, and administration." In a review of Mayakovsky's *Laznia* [*The Baths*] (December 1954), he noted, "Mayakovsky uses General Director Dupno to depict bourgeois small-mindedness, bourgeois small-mindedness that he hates."

Thus Kott diagnoses revolutionary purity as contaminated by the bourgeois habits of bureaucrats. He makes yet another face at the world, of a member of the rebellious "acne generation," younger than the *Kuznica* generation. Between 1948 and 1951, they attacked the *Kuznica* writers for their bourgeois literary tastes and demanded "acceleration" of the revolution in culture and art. The younger generation was more fanatical and intransigent. "They considered us 'intellectuals,'" wrote Kott in 1955, "and they loaded the word with all the contempt they could muster. . . .For our part, we considered them tainted by fascism at the deepest level of their personal lives." But Kott and the others of *Kuznica* were hardly "enemy agents" in need of "unmasking": they themselves were adept at attacking "the enemy."

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Many years later Kott would state: "We didn't realize how rapid had been the changing of the guard in the race to Zhdanovism and how quickly the new team had seized the baton, or rather the stick." This attitude reflected on the one hand fear of History, of the younger generation, and of the new socialist-realist esthetic, and on the other hand, an attempt to catch up with an era that was constantly changing its skin. Later Kott wrote:

> Through the window one heard the cry of a rhinoceros. Never before had anyone heard a rhinoceros in the town. Then one could actually see the rhinoceros through the window. It began to stroll around the streets. A dentist opened the door to his surgery and bellowed like a rhinoceros. The owner of a women's clothing store had a horn growing out of his head.

One could hear rhinoceroses everywhere. The rhinoceros was contagious. This scene from Ionesco's play served as an illustration. Wazyk had said he was in a lunatic asylum. Did this mean shame, self-delusion, fawning, madness? No doubt something different for each person. For Kott it meant making yet another face—the face of a rhinoceros.

The thaw brought new faces: the unmasker from *Kuznica*, unmasked by the younger generation again became an unmasker—this time, the unmasker of Stalinism. Once again he tore the masks from the hypocrites: he attacked the politics and esthetics of socialist realism; he defended jazz and the stories of Marek Hlasko. In 1955, in a review of *Groteska*, he noted: "Terrifying masks are worn by the dreadful old woman who believes in miracles, by the children, who have been fooled by the old woman, and by Serafynski, who has been fooled by stupidity. Horrible masks are also worn by the professional swindlers and specialists in miracles. The enormous, mystical, petty-bourgeois humbug wears a frightening mask. Ciemnogrod wears a mask." Thus the notion of Ciemnogrod was redefined: once it had referred to the old-Polish, chauvinistic, clerical strand of the national tradition, to which enlightened communism was supposed to provide an antidote. Now it had come to mean a way of thinking to be found within communism itself.

Then came Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. "On the opening night," wrote Kott (November 1955),

> in the stalls and in the balcony, people were in tears. The stagehands cried, the cloakroom attendants wiped their eyes with their handkerchiefs. *Forefathers' Eve* was stunning. It gave rise to

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> lengthy late-night discussions. . .it was more powerful than all the contemporary plays of the decade. It spoke about our history and about modern times. . . .All of Poland is a gigantic stage, and the young people, officer cadets and writers, patriots and traitors, are the actors. Novosiltsov and his gang of thugs and spies, and Bestuzhev with his hand held out. . . .We need to say it as clearly as possible. We are storming the communist heaven, and Mickiewicz is with us in our endeavor. Our "forefathers" are on the side of revolution and those who are clamoring for justice.

Kott's use of "we" should be noted. "We" are the inheritors of the Mickiewicz tradition, storming the communist heaven. But who are "they"? "They" are the inhabitants of Ciemnogrod, both the long-standing inhabitants and the newer arrivals. The title of Kott's review was a quotation: "Why do you not wish to write about this, gentlemen?" The people to whom the question was addressed—writers who refused to acknowledge Polish truths—were also "them."

Of course, "they" were also those in power. In October 1956, at the moment of the Great Turning Point, Kott once more recalled Dejmek's production of *Laznia*:

> Dejmek put Pobiedonosikov and all the others like him on a large platform. . . .This was a platform used to review the May Day parade. . . .They all sat in the front rows and clapped. . . .Precisely at this time Party comrades started referring to the leadership as "them." It's only this past week that we have begun talking about "us."

A week earlier, Gomulka had become First Secretary of the PUWP Central Committee. He embodied the hopes of the whole nation, including the "comrades." For the previous ten years, the "nation" had referred to the "comrades" as "them."

In October 1956, Kott spoke to tens of thousands of people at an enormous rally at the Warsaw Polytechnic. Several years later, he reminisced: "When I had diphtheria just after the Warsaw Uprising, after three days I spat out some tissue like the skin of a reptile. At that rally, I had the feeling that I'd finally spat out the rest of this slimy tissue."

Did he start to speak freely? And what kind of face did he adopt in his contest with the world? Once again, he is a follower of Voltaire, but he is now a different kind of Voltairean, one more suited to the new times. A post-Stalinist Voltairean, confronted with a new reading of

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Shakespeare. *Hamlet* after the Twentieth Congress—this is how Kott referred to his thinking in 1956. He wrote about how words and phrases had acquired a new meaning: "Denmark's a prison," "the gallows are built stronger than the church." He noted that the word most commonly heard on stage is "watch." "Here, everyone is being watched," he wrote, "and they are always being watched." Polonius, one of the king's ministers, sends a flunky after his son all the way to France. Behind every curtain someone is hiding. Ophelia is under surveillance, her letters intercepted. "This watchfulness corrodes everything at the castle in Elsinore: marriage, love, and friendship. What terrible experiences Shakespeare must have had at the time of Essex's conspiracy and execution to understand so well the workings of the 'Great Mechanism.'" Each person "is simultaneously part of the Mechanism and its victim, because politics here leaves its imprint on every emotion and there is no escaping it."

And Hamlet? He pretends madness; "he dons, in cold blood, the appearance of madness in order to carry out a *coup d'état*. Hamlet is mad because politics, when it rejects all feelings, is itself madness." Hamlet is "as rebellious as the young people on the journal *Po Prostu*. He has a burning passion. He lives for action, not reflection. He is angry. He revels in his own indignation. But he has regained his capacity for action. This is Hamlet after the Twentieth Congress." This is how a Voltairean skeptic sang the praises of the "angry young men." The "angry young men" of October '56 were the younger generation who several years before had condemned the bourgeois tendencies of the *Kuznica* writers for adhering to Communist principle.

From the outside, these revolutionary fanatics looked like "them" and seemed to have nothing whatsoever in common with *Hamlet*. A witness of the era, a young woman opposed to the Communist system, wrote that they were out to destroy all forms of human ties: in schools, universities, the workplace. Most of them were aggressive and ruthless; they were "informers and judges." In schools and universities, "they followed the lecturers' every sentence," denounced their "deviations," and organized campaigns against them. They felt most comfortable in an atmosphere of revolutionary vigilance. When dictatorship became stabilized, they found themselves shunted off to one side, because it was no longer the students who were to supervise the teachers, but the teachers who were to supervise the students. This was the cause of much frustration.

Kott considered George Bernard Shaw a modern-day Voltaire. In an essay on Shaw's *Saint Joan*, Kott stated: "He spoke many bitter words

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of truth to his country. He was ironic, he jeered and scoffed. He was skeptical, he defended reason, and struggled against myths of all kinds. His independent judgment and critical ability made him an authority of the intellectual left."

This left-wing syndrome and critical rationalism constituted a new profession of faith for Kott. Previously, he had been inclined, like Voltaire, to deride Joan of Arc's heroism, to jeer at her ignorance and fanaticism, and at the demons and the spirits which haunted this "bellicose simpleton." Now, like Shaw, he was inclined to defend her greatness in the language of rational analysis and common sense, and to defend her against the kind of narrow rationalism symbolized by Flaubert's Monsieur Homais, "an enthusiast of progress and the classic type of rationalist stupidity. A personal enemy of God, he believed blindly in the powers of patent medicines, parliamentarianism, and the press." He exchanged his belief in God for belief in progress.

"Personally, I don't believe in God," wrote Kott, "but I also know that not believing in God is not enough to understand history." This is certainly true, but it should be added that Monsieur Homais's tirades against religion and the Church were harmless stupidities in comparison with Kott's journalistic attacks on Turowicz, Golubiew, and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Our hero-narrator did not like the Church in general, and peasant Catholicism in particular. For him it was a reservoir of fanatical ignorance. Thus Joan of Arc was "first the tool, and then the victim of clericalism and superstition. . .the village idiot who was used by the court to manipulate ignorant feudal knights." One may refuse to acknowledge her virtues—her intelligence, bravery, and greatness. But Kott also sees her—as did Shaw—as a representative of a new popular patriotism and awakened national consciousness. And heroism. Of all the "decent and sensible people, Joan was the only one who wasn't an opportunist," wrote Kott. "Only she has strength of character and courage, only she perseveres until the very end. Sensitive and human, she fears death and suffering, but she remains true to herself. She does not break down during interrogation. She is sent to the stake by the state and church apparatus."

Kott tries to understand those who condemn Joan of Arc as well. Calmly and soberly, they condemn her—for *raison d'état*, historical necessity, and dogma. Essentially, she is a victim of the system. This provides the basis for "the lie of *raison d'état* and the Great Mechanism." Kott ends by saying, "We are on the side of Joan." In other words, on the side of virtue, simplicity, and heroism. But how was one to be on the side of heroism when the Soviets were invading Budapest? When some

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people—like Wiktor Woroszylski—were broadcasting reports from the burning city, and others—like Kisielewski—were calling for caution because they feared a possible Soviet invasion of Poland? After two months, Kott returned to the subject of Joan of Arc. In October, Saint Joan had been "rational in her madness." At that time all of Poland had been "rational in its madness." But was this still the case after a victory achieved without bloodshed in Poland and the bloody intervention in Hungary? "When you are the weaker side, you can be victorious only once. After that, God helps the stronger side." This is why caution was necessary, why heroic Joan of Arc became an unnecessary nuisance.

Stefan Kisielewski, the heroic joker of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, knew this well. He would have wanted "Joan to return to her family village. He would not have wanted her to save anyone or try to do so. . . .Only Woroszylski would have wanted her to be a saint. Even Jerzy Zawiejski would have been against. He would have become an adviser to the parliament in Paris, he would have forgiven the English, and he would have prayed that Joan avoid the stake, because he had a warm heart. But he would have sentenced her to life imprisonment." And our hero-narrator? He no longer has complete faith in Joan. He can see both sides of the issue. He respects level-headed analysis and rational argument. "Passion is one-sided"; rationality encourages discussion. Maybe those who said that in the end the English would be driven out and France united were right. "Maybe there really was no cause to rush to make history." So, get thee to a nunnery, Joan!

In 1957, a group of distinguished writers formerly associated with *Kuznica*, among them Jan Kott, left the PUWP. This was a gesture without precedent. Until then, no one had ever left the Party; the only way out was expulsion. The fact that these writers left the Party had symbolic significance. The very people who after the war had urged the Polish intelligentsia to support the communist leadership were now publicly withdrawing their support for the communists.

A high-level Party apparatchik commented, "I am amazed to see such unprecedented capitulation on the part of communists in the face of bourgeois liberalism and the abandonment of any attempt to struggle for socialist culture." The anti-communists greeted the developments following October '56 with delight and optimism. The difference must be emphasized. The rebellious ex-communists were devastated by Khruschev's report, the Polish October, and the invasion of Hungary, while their former adversaries saw these events as a source of hope for normality.

The hero-narrator we find in the pages of Kott's books and essays was not aware of this difference. And yet he was viewed as one of those

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responsible for the tribulations that Stalinism had brought to science and culture. It was he who was accused of refusing to accept responsibility, of passing moral judgment on Gomulka's associates, who were far less virulent than he had been, of assigning responsibility to others, and of appropriating to himself the role of leader of Polish emancipation, of wanting to lead the people whose self-expression he had once ruthlessly stifled.

These accusations contained a substantial grain of truth and considerable bitterness. Our hero-narrator and, no doubt, Kott as well, considered themselves victims of communism rather than its architects. Others viewed them differently, and this is not surprising. Nevertheless, they were attacked for their communism at the moment they broke with it, and for this break they paid a price. There was, then, a settling of accounts with people who were already opponents of communism, although the nature of their opposition was not always clear.

"We are all a bit lost and are slowly finding our way," Kott wrote in June 1954. "We are undergoing shock therapy to cure us of the great ideologies." This meant he had to look for another face to adopt in contest with the world and that he had to review his previous faces. As early as 1954, he wrote about the debate over Aleksander Fredro. He recalled Goszczynski's brutal attack on the playwright for his antipathy toward conspiracy and the romantic vision of the country, his imitation of foreign models, and his uncritical praise for the traditions of the nobility. This attack was similar in tone to Kott's diatribes against other writers. And he was honest enough to admit that then, in the nineteenth century, it would have been easier for him to find a common language with Goszczynski, a parochial and good-humored Jacobin, than with "that embittered Count, who was incredibly intelligent but also incredibly reactionary." Goszczynski, like Kott after him, wanted to destroy the Poland of the nobility. He wanted a social revolution "with big words and morals." None of this was to be found in Fredro, but it was Fredro who "rescued Poland from widespread melancholy." These were unusual thoughts in 1954. Their conclusion was equally unusual: Goszczynski and other critics had failed to recognize Fredro's intelligent realism; their judgment had been "immature. . . .But were all their opinions unfair? I don't know. If I had been alive at that time, there's no doubt I would have written about Fredro even more harshly. I would have been mistaken. But I would have had my reasons."

This article constituted a face-making contest with himself. Perhaps also an act of tearing off his own mask. Four years later (November 1958), Kott wrote about another great reactionary, Zygmunt Krasinski:

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"He knew how to hate and was wonderfully alienated from the epoch, but at the same time he was most closely entwined with it."

To consider the situation of Fredro and Krasinski is both to try to understand and to refuse to engage in accusation. It also involves asking how to be simultaneously present and absent in one's own epoch. In the epoch of "the small stabilization," this was a fundamental question for someone who had watched the student demonstration after the banning of *Po Prostu* in 1957 and who had read about the execution in 1958 of Imre Nagy—a communist and the prime minister of a rebellious Hungary. Our hero-narrator didn't want to take part in this; he didn't want to bear the responsibility. Nor did he want to be absent. Gomulka's "small stabilization" was a kind of barren interlude, a period of waiting. Waiting for what? For a change for the better, for a better socialism. Kott saw in this "waiting for Godot" the boredom of the canny Pole. "He is waiting for Godot, but he believes less and less that he will actually come. Every evening, little boys and important politicians tell him that he will surely come tomorrow. Sometimes he even reads this in the newspapers." In such a climate the atmosphere is akin to that of waiting for the end of the world. There is no place here for Voltairean enthusiasm. Here, Wyspianski's *Wyzwolenie* [*Liberation*] is transformed into "a cabaret, a monumental and monstrous burlesque." To foreigners, therefore, *Wyzwolenie* is just "a product of Polish craziness." And in this lies the heart of the matter: "We are seen as crazy and thus not fully responsible for our actions."

This craziness means living in a state of befuddlement, in a world where everyone repeats after Gombrowicz: "I am not so crazy that in these Crazy Times I either do or do not have an opinion." To put it another way, it means to live in a state between "persistent and shameless self-pity. . .mandatory belief in the insane idea that from the ashes of the nation an ash will arise to avenge us," and the desire for normality.

History has no meaning, and "cultivating one's own garden" *à la* Voltaire is simply naive self-delusion: it is either cruel or farcical—the fate of communities that find themselves living on a volcano. Kott's essay on the end of the world, in other words the eruption of the volcano (February 1959), is crucial to understanding the new face of our hero-narrator—the face of the philosopher of the absurd.

He sees the volcano beginning to smolder; any minute now it will erupt; there is no possibility of escape. What should one do? How should one behave sensibly? There are four possible approaches. First, "refuse to acknowledge the volcano's existence. Avoid allowing yourself to be caught up in eschatology. Live as though nothing were happening.

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This approach has some characteristics of clowning but is also stoical." Second, the eruption of the volcano is presented as a historical necessity. The volcano then becomes a deity. It is possible to pray to it, and to demonstrate rationally the necessity for the eruption. The third approach is the heroic one. One must struggle against the volcano regardless of the chances of victory, in the way Camus's heroes struggled with the plague. Barricades and shelters must be built. If one manages to stem the flow of lava, this approach will be heroic; if the lava overflows the inhabitants in their homes, it will be decidedly farcical. The fourth approach is to keep on doing business as usual right up to the last minute. This is the most widespread approach, but it turns out to be farcical when the volcano actually erupts.

There seems to be no sensible approach to the end of the world, only farcical ones. Even heroism becomes farcical. A sense of absurdity prevails over all else. From here on, our hero-narrator will be reading Shakespeare and Kafka, Beckett and Witkacy afresh. He will find the absurd everywhere. About Mrozek's *Tango* he will write that it isn't a work of surrealism: "Mrozek is a realist, a realist about Polish absurdity."

Kott not only wrote books and essays: he also signed protests, such as the "Letter of the 34," the first collective protest of Polish intellectuals against censorship. As before, he was ferociously intelligent, bold, and popular. He was the "jester" of the Gomulka years, in the positive sense of the word. He remained on close terms with the inner circle. At opening nights he would come across ministers and say malicious things to them. In 1966 he left Poland for a lecture tour of the United States. In 1968 he chose to become an émigré.

Kott continued to search for new faces to carry on his contest with the world. He sympathized with the American protest movement, enjoyed the student rallies at Berkeley, and signed petitions against U.S. intervention in Vietnam. He wrote vividly, intelligently, deceitfully. And yet his writing lost something that had made him one of the most sensitive barometers of historical processes. Only the most attentive reader would perceive that nearly everything he wrote was a fragment about himself. And he wrote two different autobiographies—a public one, *Przyczynek do autobiografii* [*Contribution to an Autobiography*], and a secret one, whose outline I shall now attempt to trace.

Kott didn't understand Russia, and—like the rest of Poland—he was afraid of it. He was also afraid to write about this fear. This provided the basis for Gogol's venom. He could have coped with Hegel, but not with the Spirit of the Times embodied in the Red Army. Years later, he described his meeting with Boris Pasternak in 1947. The great

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poet, living in disfavor on the margins of official life, told this Voltairean-Marxist that one day he and his colleagues at *Kuznica* would wake up behind bars. "Now," said Pasternak, "you are like birds singing in the trees. Everyone is singing his own tune. In a cage, even a gilded cage, you will be described as a 'former futurist,' a 'former symbolist.' You'll find yourselves in a zoo for 'enemies of the people.'" These were words to send shivers down the spine. They were also prophetic.

Kott saw Russia through the eyes of Gogol—a Russia where "there is no laughter, only fear," where "there is emptiness and silence," where "everything trembles and shivers like a leaf," where everything "is imbued with menace." Where "disorder" reigns, where all is "confusion, muddle, and nonsense." Where everything, even sleep, "begins and ends in dread." In the faces of apparatchiks and security agents, he saw the outline of such a Russia beginning to take shape in Poland. Fearing any kind of Russia, he never sympathized with its dissidents. He fled from Russia and sought refuge on the campuses of American universities, in experimental theater, and in exploration of the erotic. His essays acquired a different rhythm when he wrote about Poland, about Witkacy and censorship, about Borowski and Gombrowicz, Andrzejewski and Grotowski—and especially about Stempowski and Konwicki.

Kott saw Konwicki's *A Polish Complex* as signifying the revival of history. The revival of the legend of the January Uprising in Konwicki's ultra-contemporary style of writing caused Kott to declare: "Time did not stand still. It's just that history has revived." Kott regarded Jerzy Stempowski as his mentor. In a 1976 essay on Stempowski, Kott returned to the question of how one should behave at a time of apocalypse or plague, the end of the world, when "all moral and social norms collapse and all apparent choices seem pointless." He had once written that every choice, even a heroic one, is a farce. Now he reiterated Stempowski's view that after the flood one has to seek out people who "will prepare themselves for another flood and may have a new plan for building a new ark."

In other words, one must seek out dissidents because there is something both noble and valuable in their attitude. Kott wrote:

> There are two different dissident traditions: the Aryan and the Puritan; and the Central and East European and the Anglo-Saxon. But one element common to both traditions is rejection of state religion and recognition of individual conscience and unfettered intelligence as the last resort which makes it possible to distinguish

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> between the law and legalized illegality, between a just war and rapacious invasion, and between obedience to the law and slavery. The most unexpected and thought-provoking feature of the contemporary dissident movement is the revival of long-forgotten, antiquated, almost cottage-industry forms of protest and resistance: *samizdat*, the chain method of transmitting information, silent picketing, individual hunger strikes, books smuggled across frontiers, open letters signed by a selected group. I belong to a generation which—and I am not just referring to those of us who believed in its two extreme ideologies—believed in modern forms of organization: large-scale political movements, discipline, and sworn obedience seemed to us the only effective means of improving the world. Recent experience has shown that large political systems, just like the most modern airplanes and computers, have their weak points. A whole army of policemen and spies finds it extremely difficult to prevent a meeting of a dozen people who have decided to speak their mind. In this world, which has been hacked into three different pieces, it has been impossible to silence the quiet voice of the cottage-dissidents. The dissident position has demonstrated not only its moral values but also its political effectiveness. It is one of the few sources of fragile hope that remain. And dissidents are to be found not only in countries ruled by communist parties.

Kott's essay, in a collection entitled *Kamienny Potok* [*The Stony Stream*], was published by the underground publishing house, NOWa. In this way he returned to Poland.

Kott had always conceived Poland in a particular way. He loved and understood the Poland of the Enlightenment and Kollataj's *Kuznica* group, the Poland of the positivists and Boleslaw Prus, the Poland of *Wiadomosci Literackie*, Boy and Slonimski. He felt at home in, and in touch with, this Poland. He didn't trust or understand the messianic-insurrectionist Poland, the nationalist-Catholic Poland, the Poland of the Home Army and Mikolajczyk. He saw all the blemishes and pitfalls of this tradition and failed to see its brilliance and splendor. Did he understand his friend Wlodzimierz Pietrzak, a critic associated with the journal *Prosto z mostu* and the radical nationalist right? Did he understand postwar Catholicism, Wyszynski and Wojtylla? People from the Home Army, Zbigniew Herbert and Jan Jozef Szczepanski? I'm not talking about approving but about understanding the extent of their tragedy. Kott defended himself with laughter, irony, and derision. These are excellent weapons, but they do not facilitate understanding. Laughter is

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always a mask. When you're wearing a mask, it's difficult for people to see your face.

> The sanctimonious hypocrite is a mask, but does Tartuffe have a real face? He is not who he pretends to be, and he pretends to be someone he is not. He is an impostor, but what will happen if he dissembles perfectly? He wears a mask, but what if he never takes it off? A perfect hypocrite is a living contradiction: a person who has become the role he plays. He no longer has a face; the mask has become fixed to his face.

This is a kind of warning that Kott issued to himself. He was constantly changing his mask, sometimes from necessity and sometimes because he wanted to. There was a lot of "affectation and desire to please" in this, but he never ceased being sincere in his own way. "The strangest thing about him is that all his faces, all his masks are simultaneously genuine and fake, that on the surface they don't fit together, they are incoherent and in each of them there is a fragment of himself. Perhaps taken together they constitute a whole epoch and its style." This sounds like an apt description of our hero-narrator. In fact, this is Kott writing about Ignacy Krasicki.

Kott utters the most fundamental truths as though in passing, always concealed and encoded—as in Juliusz Slowacki's reflections on Poland in his letters to his mother. He refused to admit to himself that, in an era of enthusiasm for Progress, Reason, and Revolution, he believed in the rule of an enlightened elite over the unreasoning, ignorant, and reactionary Polish population. In this lay the greatest sin of *Kuznica*: they wanted to bring enlightenment by force, under cover of dictatorship and the Red Army. They understood all the pitfalls of nationalist mysticism, but they didn't understand the close link between Voltairean reason and the Jacobin guillotine. As for communism—they didn't want to understand it. They knew the bourgeois hypocrisy of the 1930s and wanted to demystify it, to tear the mask from its face and reveal it for what it was. All of Kott's writings, the whole of the intelligentsia's settling of accounts, were focused on this unmasking. "The aim of the most varied and changing constructs was always to show official history to be a joke," wrote Hannah Arendt, "to demonstrate the existence of a sphere of hidden influences, in light of which the observable historical reality that can be followed and known is nothing but a facade erected for the sole purpose of fooling people."

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They wanted to reveal the inner workings of History. But History isn't just inner workings, and morality isn't just a hypocritical mask of high-mindedness concealing a network of dirty interests and shabby behavior. The attack on the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy gave rise to a specific alliance between the elite and the rabble. The rabble, too, hates the hypocritical world in which it has been deprived of privileges and is looked down on. According to Hannah Arendt, "The alliance between the elite and the rabble could be explained by the unfeigned delight that the elite took in the rabble's destruction of anything considered decent." An apt example is provided by the fate of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, which portrayed gangsters as respectable businessmen and businessmen as gangsters. The rebellious elite applauded the play for its courageous and bitter irony: "exposing hypocrisy was such irresistible fun." Nevertheless, notes Arendt, when "the rabble greeted this play as signifying artistic approval of gangsters, the irony disappeared." Furthermore, "the only political result of Brecht's revolution was to encourage everyone to reject the inconvenient pressures of hypocrisy and to adopt openly the standards of the rabble."

Quite early on, Kott discovered—albeit from a novel perspective—the ambiguity contained in André Gide's writings. Lafcadio was a dangerous rebel, although Kott was equally irritated by Gide's anti-Soviet stance. He didn't detect the ambiguity inherent in his own stance: his hero-narrator, a Voltairean-Bolshevik, "dug his own grave" when he rejected Conrad and Malraux, Kisielewski and Golubiew, and thus paved the way for cultural barbarism and vulgar philistinism.

Years later, in 1971, Kott came to see this:

> Among the titans, artists, and demons, scoundrels and poseurs are always lurking. The scoundrels are young and of the people. They can be divided into two groups: the metaphysical and the ordinary. The metaphysicals resort to cruelty and meanness to drown out the mystery of life. The ordinary scoundrels want to have money and women, to use the world and take charge. They throw their weight around and have absolutely no inhibitions. They pretend to be meek and mild in order to worm their way in everywhere. Edek in Mrozek's *Tango*, a modern-day Fortinbras who kills a modern-day Hamlet with a blow of his fist, is from the same family as all of Witkiewicz's common scoundrels. The poseurs—gigolos and petty crooks—sometimes pretend to be artists and are ready to provide whatever service might be called for, no matter how despicable.

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The days were long gone when a young *Kuznica* editor enthused about the progress brought by the age of reason. For Kott, as for many others of his generation, the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the stabilization of the early Gomulka years undermined his faith in the feasibility of reform. He never again enthused about anything, although from time to time it seemed as though he was again prepared to get involved—but only briefly and from a distance. By the end of the 1950s, he viewed history and his epoch with ever greater irony. "Thanks to the so-called philosophy of our century, the most stupid of all centuries, we have been left to fall prey to misfortunes of all kinds, and, to make things worse, we talk so much nonsense about ourselves that when our grandchildren and great-grandchildren read the history of this era, they won't believe such things were possible. . . .As always, the masks fall away in old age, one after the other." So wrote Kott—again, about Ignacy Krasicki.

Kott joined the Polish Workers' Party during the occupation, to be in tune with History, to be on the side of progress, modernity, and social reform. Was that all? He couldn't stand the prewar establishment, nor its wartime underground and émigré counterparts. He felt himself rejected and ignored:

> During the occupation, Warsaw was an intellectual backwater, provincial and isolated. Twentieth-century intellectual trends became monstrously deformed. Writers and scholars became financially dependent on the London government's network of agents. Historical falsehoods were artificially kept alive, thought and creativity stagnated and died away. Who received financial support? Zawieyski, Milosz, Jadzwing-Suchodolski. . . .At the same time, the policy of eliminating all left-wing ideas and creativity was strictly enforced. . . .Even something as trifling as my participation in organizing poetry readings was considered undesirable. These are not just old grudges, but pertinent reminders to the current defenders of freedom of the press and those who are calling for justice in the allocation of paper and newsprint.

This was the most dangerous of our hero-narrator's faces. He donned the mask of the just avenger of yesterday's wrongs. He distorted reality, presenting the conflict between the veterans of the Home Army and communist Poland as though it were the dispute between the Targowica Confederation and those who favored reform. He was passionate in his condemnation of actors who appeared on stage during the occupation.

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He sharply attacked the court that acquitted Stanislaw Wasylewski of having collaborated with the occupying forces. (Wasylewski then worked at and wrote for *Gazeta Lwowska*.) The court was of the opinion that Wasylewski's writings "provided the population of the eastern borderlands with spiritual sustenance." "While the Lvov Jews were being murdered," wrote Kott, "Wasylewski wrote essays about flowers, birds, and castles." He considered the justification for the verdict an insult to those who wrote for, printed, and distributed the underground press. He labeled Wasylewski's behavior despicable and cowardly.

I read these articles by Kott with a growing sense of confusion. In their tone, style, and morally ambiguous pomposity, they are similar to much that has been written in support of lustration and decommunization in recent years. Only it's not Wasylewski who is now under fire, but Boy. And he too is being criticized for his writings in Lvov during the occupation—but under a different occupying power. In this sense, Kott's settling of accounts ought to constitute a warning to those who are now hot on the trail of writers and intellectuals who "collaborated" with communism. The devil of fanaticism can change his mask—from that of Voltaire to that of the Grand Inquisitor.

In fact, Kott's entire life story can be read as an object lesson. I have read it closely and carefully, because it is somehow close to mine. Malraux used to be one of my favorite writers. I loved the tradition of the Enlightenment; I loved the derision of the rationalists; I couldn't stand sentimental trash, nationalist megalomania, or clerical intolerance and hypocrisy. The *Kuznica* syndrome was especially familiar to me, so that its end was part of my own life story. At some point, I'd like to write about *Kuznica*—and in a way that's different from what has been written so far. I'd like to write about wonderful writers who became tools of totalitarian dictatorship. How did this happen? How did they finally make a break with the system? What happened to them afterwards? I'd like to write about Kazimierz Brandys, the author of *Romantycznosc*, a book much admired by Kisielewski, and about his *Wariacje pocztowe* [*Postal Variations*], one of the best stories ever about Poland and Polishness, as well as about *Miesiace* [*Months*], an unusual chronicle of the end period of communism, and *Nierzeczywistosc* [*Unreality*], a fascinating document in which the writer spits out the gag that has been stifling him. I'd also like to write about Dygat and Hertz, about Rudnicki, Jastrun, and Wazyk, and about Stefan Zolkiewski, a distinguished man of integrity who became entangled in the communist apparatus. Without an understanding of the *Kuznica* phenomenon, the phenomenon of betrayal by the intellectuals and their subsequent redemption, it is

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impossible to understand the history of the Polish intelligentsia—and perhaps the history of Poland. But I'd also like to write about it in order to send myself a warning about the secret venom concealed within the books and articles of these great people and great writers.

"People who were young at that time grew up with the belief that to live life to the full one had to be involved. 'Standing on the sidelines' meant not knowing what life was about." Perhaps this was the source of the poison? Activism, involvement, searching in this adventure for a full life? I have always loved the writings of Jan Kott, although it's only now that I have discovered in them the monologue that winds through successive volumes written over many years, the monologue of the hero of *Lost Illusions*, the lost illusions of our era. I have always been enchanted by his language, pithy and nimble, adroit and rich, and have marveled at his ability to recreate himself and read the signs of the times, and at his unequaled humor. I have even marveled at his ability to use Stalinist language. How did he do it?

However, Kott did not understand the Poland that was traditional, provincial and rural, the Poland that was naively patriotic, Catholic, well-intentioned, and imbued with complexes. He didn't understand its moral principles, or its phobias and fears. One may take issue with this Poland; but without understanding it, light-handed irony becomes venomous meanness.

Kott was saved by his exceptional talent and by his ability to laugh. He was lucky—the merciful God is indulgent towards people with a sense of humor. He likes quick-witted scoffers. But the Good Lord is not only merciful. He is also just. It is from the Good Lord that we get our sense of honor. It was the Good Lord who inspired Conrad to persuade us that honor isn't something thought up by shipowners looking to make a profit. One of Kott's most moving essays is the one about dying. Death asks the ultimate question. Honor really does exist.

> *We are reconciled after a long quarrel*
> *knowing that of human happiness not a single stone will remain.*
> *The earth will open wide its mouth, and in its hollow cathedral*
> *the last pagans will be baptized.*

Thus ends the story of a realistic person who danced with masks.

Translated from the Polish by Jane Cave

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ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

From *Another Beauty*

Dluga Street didn't belong to our world. It had little in common with the historical moment, with the moment designated by that proud, often misused phrase "the present day." It was a flagrant anachronism, even though a few steps away Warsaw Street ran obligingly in the direction of the capital and Dluga Street itself bisected Three Poets' Boulevard, already a busy thoroughfare by the 1960s. But of course this kind of distance from the reigning age is something completely different for a street than it is for living, feeling people. Streets are usually mindless: their low brows don't conceal hope, despair, or ideas. The rooftops lie placidly on apartment buildings. But one may suppose or suspect certain things nonetheless. Thus it seems to me that Dluga Street preferred horses and horse-drawn carriages. Peasant carts probably suited it best, but it had no objection to smart coaches with cushioned rubber wheels rolling merrily on their springs. There was a place for such things, they fit the street's tricky character. In the winter fragrant horse dung garnished the white snow with yellow spots, steaming lavishly; it lured the local sparrows, greedy for any sort of diversion. Dluga Street was caught painfully off guard by modern history. It didn't like electricity or internal combustion engines; it didn't like Hitlerism, introduced by the triumphant Wehrmacht, or Stalinism, imported by the Red Army. It would have been happy with horses, carts, and the sweet scent of manure. Servants' shouting, the parasols of elegant ladies, the changing seasons, rain, snow, and sun—these would have filled its modest life completely. Some of these enduring things lingered on. In the fall, heaps of coal rose on the sidewalk, transported in scuttles, or shoveled with spades straight into cellars. Before the Christmas holidays, firs and pines sprouted on balconies, and luckless, bug-eyed carps with voluptuous lips were brought home by patresfamilias in nets from which drops of water fled. There, in the dense hedgerows of

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apartment houses rubbing walls in solidarity as if boosting one another's spirits in troubled times, there on the fourth floor, lay the tiny estate of Mrs. C., where I rented my first room in Krakow.

Mrs. C. is doubtless no longer living. Mrs. C. would certainly not have wanted her noble surname disclosed to the reading public. Thus she will remain simply Mrs. C., former member of the landed gentry—an F.L.G., FLAG, as they were usually known—although now, after the war, she governed not an entire estate but a single small apartment.

I didn't know much about her. I don't know what happened to her husband, or if she'd actually ever been married. I didn't know if she had children, and if so, where they lived. Mrs. C. despised her tenants and almost never spoke with them, that is, with us. Her personal life, the prehistory of her present existence, thus could not be uncovered. But no, I misspoke, she didn't despise her tenants, it wasn't anything so simple, so vulgar. Her true residence was elsewhere, in a different realm, in some imperceptible, inscrutable register of the cosmos. She wasn't there among us, among those who had agreed that the gray world of Communism actually did exist. She refused to endorse a treaty with Reality; she performed in a different theater, dwelled in a different country. She wasn't among us—we met her only in the apartments' corridor, a dismal hallway that called to mind the ruined parts of town. Mrs. C. was determined to maintain her prewar status in this shabby setting. She had decided to remain an heiress, the mistress of an estate, and continued to look down her nose at those from other walks of life. This decision determined everything, since she wasn't actually distinguished in any way, she didn't know any more than ordinary people, she wasn't a blue blood, a true aristocrat. She was a short, heavy woman with a cross, homely face like a crushed doughnut, hair of an indeterminate color and a damp, unpleasant voice.

Her policy was simply not to appear, to leave the parlor that was also her bedroom as seldom as possible. To be invisible, not to be swallowed up in others' eyes, to shield her essence—but what was her essence?—from contact with other essences. She almost never left the house, and exhaustive preparations preceded her infrequent outings, as if major international publications had sent swarms of photojournalists to lie in wait for her on the street. Once I heard her say, "Each exit is my Rapallo." Why Rapallo? She probably didn't know herself, but Rapallo had a nice, round ring to it. From time to time she entertained company—aging ladies drawn only from her own class, the F.L.G.'s—and then only in the afternoon, at English teatime, never for dinner in the evening.

Mrs. C. was preoccupied with her historical mission, with the defense of her own social position, the defense of feudalism in a hostile

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Communist environment. It was taboo to touch a broom, peel potatoes, wash the floor, make dinner. Such seemingly inconsequential actions could lead to only one thing: the annihilation of her higher substance, the substance that was her greatest and—why beat around the bush?—only treasure. If she were to make herself a soft-boiled egg or fry a schnitzel, then the dignity of an entire era would collapse with a crash, the Middle Ages would finally grind to a halt.

Fortunately there was someone to wash the windows and floors, do the shopping, make lunch and dinner: Helena, the maid, the servant, the serf. Helena got up every day at 4:00 A.M. and took the early streetcar—full of desperadoes with eyes red from exhaustion—in to work. She worked as a janitor in the city's center for rat control and perhaps as a result she herself looked a little like a rat: she had a narrow snout, a straight nose, and small, bright eyes. She was short and deft, restless and meddlesome. No one ever did battle for this Helen beneath the walls of Troy. When she left for work at dawn, the rest of the apartment house had not yet woken up; most of the town's inhabitants were still sound asleep. Mrs. C. was undoubtedly asleep, I was sleeping, and so was my roommate, an enigmatic engineering student two years older than myself. The entire house woke up only around seven-thirty when Helena returned with the brisk air of one who had done her small part in exterminating the city's rats. Helena came home from work just as bleary civil servants were approaching the city's many office buildings, and as the rats lay down to sleep in their lairs.

Helena was called upon to deal with the outside world, with history and nature, with pigeons and crows, with cats, with the milkman, mailman, and chimney sweep, with soot and milk. She was the one who handled concrete objects; she inhaled dust, polished the doorknobs and scoured the kettle. She was always in a rush, no time to rest, she hurried and scurried. She slept in the kitchen, on a couch covered with a brown bedspread by day. At night she pored over the local paper by lamplight; this was her only chance to contemplate the varieties of human folly. She would put on her wire-rimmed glasses and scrutinize the events listed in the crime column: someone had murdered someone else, out of love or envy, for money. I think she sighed then with relief, since this meant the world had not entirely lost its earlier, prewar imagination and wasn't yet reduced to meetings of the one party's central committee. Mrs. C. handed down instructions, managed the expenses, and, like any minister of finance, complained about costs and Helena's unconscionable overspending.

From time to time horrific quarrels erupted between the mistress and her galley slave for no apparent reason; as in an arsenal, the slightest

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spark could set off an explosion. Helena would give her oppressor notice, slam the door, run out of the house, come back, slam the door again, and scream, "I've had it! Why is it always me, me, me, always just me." Because of her daily streetcar rides and her contact with people, Helena had a better grasp of what was actually happening in Krakow and the country. She was the one who sensed the city's shifting moods; she was the one who read the paper, even though she only read the crime column. In theory, she should have gradually gained the upper hand in the household; Mrs. C. would then have been reduced to the role of a British sovereign, forced to approve automatically all decisions taken by the government. But Mrs. C. demanded absolute power; she refused to accept reforms. Her reign was not founded on education or a grasp of modern life. Her right to rule was underwritten by a certain style, a certain manner of speaking and dressing (she liked white blouses, washed and pressed by Helena), a certain fussy way of puckering her lips, her four words in French. Knowledge was beside the point. Mrs. C. had no interest in current events. What had to happen had already happened. The notion of following changes in Communist policy and ideology never entered her mind. If someone had told her that there was a real difference between Communism's most brutal year, say, 1952, and the Gomulka period in the sixties, she wouldn't have believed it for a minute. No, she would have refused even to listen.

Helena's rebellions never got off the ground. Mrs. C. didn't suppress them, she simply waited them out. She locked herself up in her little parlor as if it were a fortress, fasted, and patiently waited for the storm to pass. And the storm always did pass. Helena always relented and returned to her endless duties. For a time she would be cross and tight-lipped, but resigned. She would snort angrily and mock everyone who spoke to her, but finally this routine bored even her, and shrugging, she'd regain her usual good nature. Sometimes she took it out on us, the tenants.

She was a magpie, a snoop. I suspected her of regularly rummaging through our things and once left a card that said "Please don't look here" in my desk drawer. Helena took offense and didn't speak to me for several days, and then, when her anger had subsided, she reproached me bitterly: "How could you even think such a thing? So you don't trust me at all."

These two aging women, ugly, taken from a second-rate Dutch painting, hating and tolerating each other by turns, forgiving or forgetting the differences between them, truly existed; brisk, nimble Helena and phlegmatic Mrs. C., pursing her lips. They both went to church on Sunday, but never together. Helena preferred the early mass, while Mrs. C.

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attended only high mass, carrying a black prayerbook in her right hand and a genuine calfskin handbag in her left.

They lived trapped in a cage, in a second-rate Dutch painting, in a cramped apartment, in spite. I was a student then, attending lectures; everything seemed open, possible. I rushed out of that fourth-floor apartment and instantly forgot the two women's tragedies and hatreds. I paced the path to the neo-Gothic university with rapid steps. I strolled beneath the lush trees of the Planty gardens. At times I pitied the two women, caught once and for all within their little fates. It wasn't fair: infinity was humming right beside them, the stars came out at night. Everything was possible. I heard lectures on Husserl, on Descartes, who'd had his epiphany one night, on Pascal's fire. Some books took flame while others held only straw, clay, feathers. I knew I wouldn't stay long at Mrs. C.'s place, although there were in fact moments when I too took part in the women's dull pain, when their ill humor captured me. These were only moments, though, and I shook them off quickly. But the women were chained to their misery, their inferno; they couldn't break free of it.

Was it naive to think of them this way? Yes, it was. The jaundiced Mrs. C. couldn't suddenly run from the house and become a young girl yearning for knowledge and revelation. Helena probably couldn't escape the center for rat control.

No, it wasn't naive. They didn't want a great life. Yes, it was naive. A great life had been snatched from them forever, for all eternity. Figuring out crossword puzzles—I glimpsed this once completely by chance—was Mrs. C.'s secret. Not a cross, just a crossword. The words marched up and down, but they didn't make sense; they were powerless, crucified. A great nation's capital on a small river. Champagne for children. An African city.

And it had come to this. Mrs. C. had three tenants—two students and a tall old man, already half-dead. Hard of hearing, he listened to the radio for days on end with the volume turned up so high that the walls shook. Of course, he listened only to Radio Free Europe. He moved cautiously, as slowly as possible, shuffling his slippers across the floor. It had come to this: a few pennies in rent, a pension, a cleaning woman's pay.

No, it wasn't naive, since life is for each of us, for everyone.

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I LOST TWO HOMELANDS as a child. I lost the city where I was born, the city where countless generations of my family had lived before my birth. But the onset of Soviet-style rule meant I also forfeited my easy, natural

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access to a general, self-evident truth. It took me many years to return to life's main current, to accept once more the simplest certainties, certainties that only charlatans and madmen call into question.

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I CAME TO KRAKOW TO STUDY; it was fall, as it always is when a new school year begins. I came to study, which was praiseworthy and pragmatic, but something else drew me as well. I was propelled half-consciously by the need to recover my city, the city that had—and I knew it—been lost forever. But of course we always seek what's gone for good.

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I HAVE A PHOTOGRAPH of Krakow's city center in front of me; it's an aerial shot, taken from a plane or helicopter. I found it completely by accident—the picture was used as the cover of a brochure meant for foreign tourists. It's graced by stylized letters reading *Cracows Historic Town Centre* [*sic*]. The English phrase serves a diversionary function: it distances me from my city, it turns me into a tourist, it contradicts the obvious fact that I'm looking at something very dear to me.

The plane, or helicopter, must have been somewhere over Stradom Street, probably over the St. Catherine's Church. I'm not entirely sure, especially since the stylized English caption obscures part of the city; it covers the Bernardines' garden and orchard, reaches the bank of the Vistula, and blocks both the Sports Club Stadium and the Church on the Rock. The angle of vision coincides almost one hundred percent with a map's distinctive topological perspective, that is, with the notion that north is up, west is left, and east is right. The town center thus resembles a gigantic keyhole, while the Planty gardens look like the lush green fur collar of a thriving dentist's wife.

I look at the aerial photograph of Krakow and realize that I'm the pilot of that plane or helicopter; I'm flying over the city. I'm the pilot, I'm wearing headphones and instead of a control panel I've got an old typewriter, a pen, a pencil, or a slightly outdated computer. I have to wear headphones. The room in which I work, read, and listen to music—unless I'm in Houston—is located in the belly of an enormous building. The other occupants generate an ungodly amount of noise. A housewife paces the kitchen in high-heeled shoes one floor above me. The kitchen floor is tiled. Every so often one of my countless neighbors renovates his or her apartment, using a drill for this purpose. A drill!

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The most up-to-date models have the brute force of a tank from the last phase of World War II and are nearly as loud. A drill used even a few floors over me shatters my skull. A drill kills thought and inspiration; it's a bomb exploding inside the building.

Moreover, in front of the building there's a preschool, which an inexhaustible demography restocks every year with a herd of clamorous children, murdering and flirting with one another, imitating their seniors in love and war. One of my neighbors sneezes so loudly that the concrete walls of the building shake. Another has hysterical attacks and screams unceasingly. Each spring the people who live on the other side of the courtyard put a canary out on the balcony, and its soulless, mechanical song is closer to the sound of the drill than to that of the blackbird, the virtuoso among the local wildlife.

I have to wear headphones, and sometimes earplugs underneath the headphones. Only then does my airplane get off the ground. I have to admit it doesn't take off every day. Various obstacles and kinds of interference proliferate; some are external, while others come from within. Sometimes fog on the runway—the runway being my pine desk, purchased years ago for 400 francs in Levallois-Perret—causes flights to be delayed. Other times my plane bumps its nose against the wall right after takeoff, and I miraculously escape with my life, but my ribs and the fingers on my right hand are broken and the nurse smiles sorrowfully. On other occasions snowstorms rage above a different airport, my destination. The radio is also down, my headphones are dead, the transmitter poles have been toppled by the wind, the wires are tangled. What should I do? Jump ship, abandon my post? Read?

I often use the headphones solely as a defense against the trivial, triumphant concert of the commonplace that my colossal apartment house generates. They're a shield, but not quite good enough, they don't get me off the ground, they just protect me from demography and, imperfectly, from the drone of drills. But sometimes it happens that I'm listening to music as my plane circles near the runway, I'm listening to one of Bruckner's symphonies, for example the Ninth, whose wild energy could elevate more than one jumbo jet; or Bach, for example, his cello suites as played by Janos Starker; or Brubeck, for whom I have a special soft spot since I first listened to him when I was sixteen; or Beethoven, for example the funeral march from The Third Symphony, yes, the one where he erased the dedication to Napoleon so energetically that he wore a hole in the paper; or Mahler's Ninth, with its glorious first movement (*andante comodo*); or Schumann's third piano trio, whose opening movement—*Bewegt, doch nicht zu rasch*—probably doesn't break

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my heart alone; it promises something it can't deliver, it's as chaotic as desire, as longing, which will never be appeased.

I have headphones over my ears; the typewriter keys, pencil, pen, or computer keyboard are my controls; and the stylized English caption *Cracows Historic Town Centre* sprawls before me, blocking part of the monastic orchard belonging to the Bernardines and encroaching also—I hadn't noticed this before—on the southern fortifications of Wawel Castle. It may not be a plane after all, but a helicopter, since I'm not moving over the city's green Gobelin, I'm hovering in one spot, above the clump of St. Catherine's Church. I don't move over the city, I hover in one spot; the picture must have been taken in midsummer, the town is brown and green, surfeited with light, serene. But no, the tops of some trees are already turning yellow, I see them from above. So perhaps September has already begun, the first week of fall, and only I can see the yellowing treetops, they're still invisible below, for someone looking up it's still midsummer, but for me, far above, the first fine streaks of fall are already visible.

It's late afternoon, nearly evening, the sun slopes westward, the shadows are long and languid, nourished by the sunny day, sated. They've stretched out precisely along the line running east to west, and so run parallel to the churches' elongated bodies, which were, as we know, built upon exactly the same axis, between the sunrise and the sunset, the two most important events of the day.

A bird's-eye view reveals the city's petty secrets, secrets that would be difficult to detect from street level. The view from above resembles a confession, the town admits its venial sins—but not its true, cardinal misdeeds, you have to look for these elsewhere, in memory and forgetting.

I see how many gardens and orchards lie concealed within Krakow's walls. These gardens and orchards are invisible to ordinary mortals, to pedestrians. The high walls shield this priceless green: poplars, ashes, but also apple and pear trees. Some of the gardens cover a fair amount of territory—these are the monastic orchards. A shadow blankets them. The setting sun says goodbye to the town, which has managed to retain its rural nature, but is ashamed of it, and so keeps its green treasures concealed behind the screens of walls and fences. Perhaps it wishes to pass for a modern, cosmopolitan city and doesn't want to acknowledge its idyllically provincial courtyards, the grass that sprouts between the paving stones, the cherry trees blooming blithely in the very heart of the city.

I fly over Krakow lightly, effortlessly, like a spirit. It even seems to me that I feel the warmth of this earth, these rooftops, the lazy warmth of a summer day.

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PROFESSOR LESZCZYNSKI, who had a soft, delicate voice that broke easily, specialized in epistemology. He lectured on Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. He was frail, short, hunched, and meek, with a face so thin that it seemed to be made from plywood, and not from an ordinary, spheroid human body. He was so quiet and mild-mannered he seemed to be living only half a life; he was barely there. He always wore a loden green overcoat, always: in the winter and the summer, for spring and fall, on the street and in the well-heated lecture hall. It didn't matter if a violet-hued Siberian frost had struck, the ruthless frost of Stalin and Beria, or an extravagant, Sicilian heat wave, incapacitating even the greatest athletes—Professor Leszczynski never removed his green overcoat. Students, who see and know everything about their teachers, had an explanation for this phenomenon: Professor Leszczynski had spent some time in Auschwitz and had developed a rare condition there. His inner thermostat had stopped working. Others said no, it hadn't stopped working, it was just that he was always freezing, even in August. But here we bump up against a metaphysical argument: was he freezing, or was he just insensitive to changes in temperature?

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BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, when I return in my thoughts to Dluga Street now, after so many years, I come to the conclusion that those two ordinary, ugly, aging women, leading the most commonplace, trivial existence, an existence governed by the sluggish rhythm of the seasons, the long, gloomy winter, the frantic spring, the weekly hunt for ham at the butcher's, for carp before the holidays, for stockings in the department store on Market Square, grudging every penny, hating each other at moments—but never actually going as far as murder!—these two women were more important to the world than I was. They were a better investment for the world, its concern for them bore a higher rate of return than it would ever get from some hotheaded young student. My sudden revelations, my obsession with ancient and modern forms of spirituality were nothing more than a fuse that was already smoldering and might, under the right conditions, set off a bomb! I was potentially one of those fanatics who dream up treacherous utopias, and even if they can't realize them, they're at the very least eager to sign a petition—with both hands!—demanding absolute perfection from the world. And they're convinced that they're right! Those two women, full of anger,

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weren't looking for radical transformations, and life's unfailing instinct for self-preservation had triumphed in their plain persistence, their tedious battle for survival, the battle to make sure that there was coal in the winter and a poppy-seed cake for Easter. My flights of fancy inevitably contained a touch of scorn for anyone leading a merely normal life: you can scarcely get off the ground without some contempt for ordinary pedestrians! As if a sense of superiority were the essential, high-octane fuel for the imagination's spaceship! I could easily have become the ideal detonator for some demagogue or other. In the gray Poland plundered by the Soviet utopia there was no shortage of cunning petty demons on the Party payroll out searching for young souls with ballistic tendencies, souls who dreamed of greatness and despised the trifling daily round of worries and pursuits. Imagination's explosions do ultimately lead to the truth, but its flights come perilously close to the walls of utopia; I've encountered more than one unusually promising young man whose nuptial flight culminated in a grotesque touchdown in the cafeteria of the regional committee of the omnipresent Party.

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I LOST TWO HOMELANDS, but I sought a third: a space for the imagination, a domain that held room for artistic needs that were still not entirely clear to me. I lost a real city, but I sought a city of the imagination. I picked poetry as my province relatively late, later than many others do.

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IT MIGHT SEEM as if the inner thermostat of an entire city—Krakow, beautiful, bewitching Krakow!—had stopped working. It cheered the great violinists, David Oistrakh or Yehudi Menuhin, if they happened to visit the local philharmonic, but it was also happy to celebrate someone along the lines of Fidel Castro, who created what was perhaps the most perfect system of police surveillance in human history. Not to mention the petty tributes that the higher functionaries, raised to power by the Party machine, managed to coax now and then from the local population. The city didn't shrink from carefully staged May Day parades, a sneering caricature of spontaneous demonstrations. Nor did it forgo the pseudo-elections in which you tossed into an urn a single card prepared in advance and bearing the names of the lucky candidates: the most primitive robot could have replaced the human hand and mind entirely in performing such a fundamentally mindless function.

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THE METEOROLOGICAL DEPRESSIONS of Paris have an oceanic feel; the Atlantic dispatches them in the direction of the continent. The wind blows, dark clouds scurry across the city like racecars. The rain falls at a spiteful slant. At times the heavens' face appears, a scrap of blue. And then it's dark again, the Seine becomes a black pavement. The lowlands of Paris seethe with oceanic energy, thunderbolts pop like champagne corks. Whereas a typical Central European depression—centered somewhere above the Carpathians—behaves completely differently: it's subdued and melancholy, one might say philosophical. The clouds barely move. They're shaped differently; they're like an enormous blimp drooping over Krakow's Old Market. The light shifts gradually; the violet glow fades, giving way to yellow spotlights. The sun skulks somewhere behind silken clouds, illuminating the most varied strata of earth and sky. Some of the clouds resemble deep-sea fishes that have ascended to the surface and swim with mouths wide open, as if startled by the taste of air. This kind of weather can last for several days, the meek climate of Central Europe. And if, after lengthy deliberations, a thunderstorm does strike, it behaves as if it were stuttering. Instead of a sharp, decisive shot, it emits a series of drawn-out sounds, *pa pa pa pa*—an echo instead of a blast. Thunder on the installment plan.

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SOMETIMES, AS I PASS BENEATH the open windows of a ground-floor apartment, a radio will be playing Elvis Presley or one of his many contemporaries or descendants, hits back in the sixties, but still popular today. And the radio, accidentally overheard, evokes the shrill voice of the electric guitar as I remember it from school dances and student clubs. The shrill, primal sound of the electric guitar, like the voice of a pheasant in the meadow. The electric guitar, morose and sentimental, or at the other extreme, full of sickly vigor, never fails to revive in us that dormant Cartesian question: What is it that keeps body and soul together?

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BEAUTIFUL, BEWITCHING KRAKOW. Initiates call it one of our planet's holy places. They say that its castle hill conceals an incalculably precious stone, a rocky talisman possessing magical properties that protect

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the city from disaster—although reason forces us to confess that it's had its share of disasters. The stone's inner thermostat broke, and it submitted to long years of a gray dictatorship kept in place by bureaucratically gifted Communists.

The birth of a writer: a young man raised in the Catholic faith experiences a dazzling revelation. While praying, he suddenly realizes that he doesn't necessarily have to repeat what's printed in the missal. He can invent his own prayer. He can make up his own words.

• • •

I COULD WRITE A GUIDEBOOK about this city, this fallen city. Street by street, house by house, church by church. What happened in this building, who was betrayed, and by whom, in this apartment, who waited for whom on this street corner. And why the person never came. I could even play the judge for this occasion and condemn certain acts, censure certain people. I wouldn't lack for material; if need be, I could head for the archives and rummage through dusty files in search of compromising documents. I would be a zealous, incorruptible accuser.

But when I think of years past, when I picture that city, see its inhabitants, the passersby crowding its streets and squares, scurrying or simply strolling, leaping at the last moment onto a moving streetcar or lounging lazily on park benches or in the Planty gardens on a balmy April day, I see myself among them. I was there, too. In the Market Square, on Florianska Street, on Dluga Street; in the old university's lecture halls, in the editorial offices of local journals; I went to theaters, to the movies (most often to the movies, they were exterritorial, Plato's cozy caves and, at the same time, the cheapest travel agencies around, expediting worldwide trips for pocket change), met girls, made a living (just barely). I lived in this city, in Communism, I hopped onto streetcars—as long as they weren't moving too fast. I wrote poems and stories, I started publishing books and anxiously awaited the reviews, I wrote reviews of other people's books. (Young writers behave like public prosecutors hastily appointed by the revolutionary authorities who itch to give respected writers of the older generation the hiding they deserve for their various criminal errors and distortions: all this just in order to survive. It's easier to outlast the trying period of literary youth in a prosecutor's toga than in the defendant's box.)

In the sixties, and later, in the seventies, when I had completed my studies (not without regret), and had to get by somehow, I was fortunate: I wasn't put on trial or thrown into prison, I wasn't harassed by

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the secret police, and even though I threw myself body and soul into the opposition, I spent only an hour total at the police station. I lived, weeks and months went by, I made various compromises. Now that the era has ended, and those times are over—for good, I hope—suddenly things that seemed completely obvious, though unexpressed, have become difficult to comprehend. What was that lovely city beneath Communism's gray casing? How did it survive? What was transient and what was permanent? What still endures and what has gone forever? There are no graveyards for cities, but there is forgetfulness. What was beautiful and what repugnant? Some poems and pictures will live on, but who will revive the moments and hours?

• • •

TWO WISE MEN once met in a forest clearing. They spoke of the world's poverty, of soulless civilization, of the catastrophic fate that had consumed the inner life, of the downfall of religious feelings. They were in perfect accord: when one spoke it might just as well have been the other. The silence of the one was the other's silence too. They condemned what needed condemning, and for all the situation's gravity, they secretly rejoiced that neither was alone in this fearful, empty world: the first had the second and the second had the first.

The initial discord arose only that evening, after sunset, as they parted fondly and confided their plans for the next day. I'm going back to the desert, said the first wise man, I'll fast, meditate, spurn the world and read the classics.

I'll set off for Antioch, the second wise man said, I'll meet people, try to persuade them to my—our—vision, I'll think, write, publish articles and books, and perhaps someone will read them, maybe even be convinced and change his ways. The first wise man looked at him with unconcealed scorn and cold contempt, and vanished into the darkness.

• • •

IT SEEMS THAT PROFESSOR LESZCZYNSKI had never been in Auschwitz, as the students had whispered. But he didn't lack causes for grief; apparently, he'd lost his beloved wife early on. He'd lost his great friend, Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz. He'd lost his fortune, he'd lost an entire world of friendship and thought; he'd found himself after the war in a country as dreary as a barracks. He'd lost his youth.

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I CAN'T WRITE KRAKOW'S HISTORY, even though its people and ideas, trees and walls, cowardice and courage, freedom and rain all involve me. Ideas as well, since they cling to our skin and change us imperceptibly. The Zeitgeist chisels our thoughts and mocks our dreams. I'm intrigued by all kinds of walls; the space we inhabit isn't neutral, it shapes our existence. Landscapes enter our innermost being, they leave traces not just on our retinas but on the deepest strata of our personalities. Those moments when the sky's blue-gray suddenly stands revealed after a downpour stay with us, as do moments of quiet snowfall. And ideas may even join forces with the snow, through our senses and our body. They cling to the walls of houses. And later the houses and bodies, the senses and ideas all vanish. But I can't write Krakow's history, I can only try to reclaim a few moments, a few places and events; a few people I liked and admired, and a few that I despised.

• • •

I'M NOT A HISTORIAN, but I'd like literature to assume, consciously and in all seriousness, the function of a historical chronicle. I don't want it to follow the example set by modern historians, cold fish by and large, who spend their lives in vanquished archives and write in an inhuman, ugly, wooden, bureaucratic language from which all poetry's been driven, a language flat as a wood louse and petty as the daily paper. I'd like it to return to earlier examples, maybe even Greek, to the ideal of the historian-poet, a person who has either seen and experienced what he describes for himself, or has drawn upon a living oral tradition, his family's or his tribe's, who doesn't fear engagement and emotion, but who cares nonetheless about his story's truthfulness.

We are in fact witnessing a revival of literature that serves this very purpose, but almost no one's paid attention: writers' journals, memoirs, poets' autobiographies harken back to an archaic literary tradition, the writing of history from the viewpoint of a sovereign individual and not an assistant professor, a slave to modish methodologies, a state employee who must flatter simultaneously both the powers that be and the reigning Parisian epistemology. Examples? Here's a sampling: the autobiographies of Edwin Muir, Czeslaw Milosz, Joseph Brodsky, among other poets, the essays of Hubert Butler, Nicola Chiaromonte, the notebooks of Jozef Czapski, Albert Camus. . .the sketches of Zbigniew Herbert, Jerzy Stempowski, of Boleslaw Micinski, ill with tuberculosis. Here are

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people who refused to cheat, who eagerly sought out the truth and shrank from neither poetry nor terror, the two poles of our globe—since poetry does exist in the world, in certain events, at rare moments. And there's also no shortage of terror.

• • •

BUT THAT BOY WHO DISCOVERED that you can make up your own prayers, you don't always need a prayerbook, would also come to understand with time that a church isn't the only place where you may find divinity.

• • •

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ'S attack on poetry (*Against Poets*) doesn't rank among the harshest accusations leveled against poets in this century. Gombrowicz's essay is more along the lines of a family squabble: the poet-in-prose takes his lyrical brethren to task chiefly for condensing their poems too much, for adding too much sugar to their pastries.

But Gombrowicz's argument deals mainly with poetry's reception, and not with its essence. True, there are periods when poetry seems to offer overly rich fare ("too sweet"). The moments when we're prepared to accept and comprehend poetic intensity come along rarely. But the same is true of painting and music; only film entices us on a daily basis by promising a release from our ordinary indifference.

The English Puritan Stephen Gosson was far more radical, passionate, and primitive in his pamphlet *The School of Abuse*. Gosson argued that poets demoralize the reading public and are in fact no better than rope dancers and wandering actors (and we all know what to expect from them!). Gosson's attack—undertaken in the sixteenth century—would doubtless have been forgotten if it hadn't prompted a far more gifted author to take up the Puritan's charges. This gifted writer was, of course, Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote both verse and prose until his premature death, and who was also one of poetry's greatest champions: his *Defence of Poesie* is a classic of English literature. Sidney defends poetry, inspired poetry—and inspiration is a gift from the gods!—whose finest achievements overshadow those of both philosophy and history. Sidney's treatise, published posthumously in 1595, defends the imagination and insists that it serves good, not evil, ends.

Anyone who's ever been deeply engaged in works of the imagination will know what I have in mind: that moment when, after a long period

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of immersion, we suddenly bob to the surface and find ourselves stranded in a kind of no-man's-land. The friendly, ardent flames of imagination have abandoned us, but we don't yet stand on the solid ground of everyday common sense. We're suspended for an instant between two spheres that probably converge at some point, but we have no idea where (not in us and not for us). It's a treacherous moment; anyone who starts making lunch or dinner at such a time must take care not to precipitate a fire or even an earthquake.

• • •

THE MOST ABSORBING QUESTIONS are those we can't answer. Who is man, and by what miracle is he able to transplant his life from one era to the next, from one system to another? And who am I, since I too passed through that sorry era—and I can scarcely claim to have emerged unscathed, calm and pure, internally whole, mature, heroic, uncompromising, uninfected by alien ideas. Now, in hindsight, my defeats and weaknesses defy belief. Could that really have been me? A lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences, whose goal (the institute's, that is) was unquestionably the ideological bridling of every student to attend the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy. I lectured on the history of philosophy, but my subject was officially called "The Foundations of Marxist Philosophy." My students and I read excerpts from Plato (the defense of Socrates or the allegory of the cave), Descartes's *Meditations*, in which that disembodied philosopher actually describes his fireplace and the room in which he works, Kant, Hegel, the existentialists. Sometimes we didn't even make it to Marx, who—in defiance of chronology!—was supposed to crown and conclude the millennial efforts of European philosophy. All the same, I belonged—in name at least—to the army of hirelings sent to subjugate the students' minds.

• • •

ONCE, BACK WHEN I STILL LIVED in Gliwice, I dropped in at a bookstore that occasionally stocked books and records from the West. I was about sixteen and devoted to classical music, though I knew next to nothing about it. But I longed to learn more. That day the bookstore happened to have a rarity in stock: Beethoven's complete symphonies under the direction of Herbert von Karajan. They were Deutsche Grammophon recordings with lovely, gleaming covers that featured photographs of von Karajan. The packaging alone was enough to make them art;

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records produced in Eastern Europe were sold in soiled gray envelopes, and the photos on the covers were bleary and smeared, with misplaced blocks of color.

The salesgirls realized that they'd stumbled onto something exceptional; it even seemed to me that they were smiling with glee, which happened exceedingly rarely. I must have walked in just after this unusual delivery, since all nine symphonies were still awaiting purchasers. I knew they'd be snatched up immediately, all nine symphonies, all nine portraits of von Karajan. It never occurred to me that this was clearly a popular, hence inexpensive, series of recordings. Much later, when I became familiar with the commercial customs of the West, I understood that this handsome conductor's recordings of Beethoven's complete symphonies—or Wagner's overtures—could be picked up in almost any Western European music store.

I also knew that I didn't have much time: other customers would soon appear, some rich lawyer or doctor might take the whole set on the spot. I had to make my choice right then and there, and I had just enough for one record. I couldn't possibly purchase the entire set; that was out of the question, given my modest income.

The Complete Symphonies of Ludwig van Beethoven Under the Direction of Herbert von Karajan must have been relatively inexpensive in the West, but here in the East its price was steep, much higher than that of recordings from Poland, Czechoslovakia, or the Soviet Union, as if crossing the Iron Curtain called for a prohibitive tariff. I could afford only one symphony out of the nine.

To my shame, I knew next to nothing back then about Beethoven's symphonies, only that they ranked among the absolute masterworks of world music. I had nine records in front of me and I had to pick one. I had to take my chances right then, that moment. I suspected that some symphonies might be less wonderful than others, that I might prefer some to others; even genius occasionally nods.

I had only a few minutes. I asked the salesgirl to show me the records. But I couldn't listen to them. I couldn't spend the next eight hours in the bookstore listening to all nine symphonies. It wasn't done. Besides, some rich doctor or lawyer with cultured tastes might suddenly appear, smelling of eau de cologne, and snap up the whole set.

I scrutinized the beautifully packaged records as if I could pierce the music's mystery through layers of cardboard and paper. Looking back, I think the torture I endured then must have been one of fate's benign amusements; destiny plays tricks on us at times. Perhaps it grows bored

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during those long interludes when nothing—or next to nothing—is happening, so it thinks up petty experiments, little trial runs.

Finally I selected the Seventh Symphony. And within half an hour I had discovered that Wagner had called it "the apotheosis of the dance" and that the second movement in particular, the Allegretto would become one of my favorite pieces of music. Though years may go by when I don't listen to it (you shouldn't get too familiar with a piece of music), each time I hear it now I'm as moved as I was the first time.

I went home, listened to the records, and understood that fortune had smiled on me: I'd picked the right symphony. The seventh. All four movements struck me as beautiful, and not just the melancholy Allegretto. Those mad dashes that are the Presto and the Allegro con Brio also captivated me. And the first movement, Poco sostenuto—Vivace, is perhaps the most Beethovenesque of all, since in it we hear the composer's voice proclaiming the subject of his epic song, like an ancient poet in his opening canto.

• • •

WE DON'T LACK FOR CLOCKS. From my desk I can see at least three clocks, two electric and one quartz. One is part of my computer and says it's now 12:29. Another's built into the radio and shows 12:30. Finally my wristwatch gives me 12:31. Fortunately my watch has traditional hands and doesn't rely upon the ruthless go-betweens of glowing numerals. We've got a lot of time.

• • •

I PROBABLY DIDN'T listen to the Seventh Symphony as soon as I got home. I probably waited a day or two, seized by a superstitious fear that I'd made the wrong choice. Besides, I must have been overwrought and needed to wait for the right moment, a moment of calm and concentration.

And at this very moment I'm listening to the Seventh Symphony in Houston, from a recording (Deutsche Grammophon!) entitled *Bernstein: The Final Concert*. Leonard Bernstein, his face marked by illness—the cover bears the conductor's portrait this time too—directs the Boston Symphony for the last time in his life. He wears a white tux. One shot shows him vanishing into the wings. We see him from the rear: a white head set on a short neck, a white tux with black pants. The backstage,

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a black rectangle, lies before him—the place where the scene ends and the shadows take over.

• • •

MR. SOBERTIN WAS FRIENDLY with my parents; they may have known each other even before the war. His family was French; before it was Polonized, his last name was probably pronounced with the stress on the final syllable and a nasal *n*. He was a tall man, elegantly dressed—you had only to look closely to realize that this was the elegance of another era. I don't remember if he'd had trouble with the police back in the 1950s. But in principle he should have been locked up just for deviating so completely from the model man of the new age. Courteous, beautifully bred, civil to all—how on earth did he survive those times?

He was a bachelor, a gallant gentleman, a troubadour ready to serve any fair lady in the most disinterested and noble fashion. I sensed that he was smitten with my mother, that she was one of his sacred Dulcineas. What struck me most, though, was his manner of taking leave; I made fun of it, after he'd gone, of course. He couldn't allow himself to turn his back on us, so he withdrew with his rear to the door, clicking his heels together repeatedly with an almost military precision. It was irresistibly comic.

Mr. Sobertin should have lived in Provence, not in Communist Poland. He'd muddled both his epoch and his geography. His forebears had erred by settling in my country.

He was a bachelor in both the new and old senses of the word: a knight bachelor who'd found neither a wife to settle down with nor the proper historical moment to inhabit.

His closest friend was the handsome Mr. Cybulski, with his thick graying mane and bushy brows; he'd lost his wife and child in the Warsaw Uprising. They often came to see us together, the widower and the aging bachelor, two mournful men with a melancholy charm, as if drawn from some old-fashioned deck of cards.

I enjoyed their visits. They didn't stay long, usually just for afternoon tea and not for supper. Then they'd disappear and return to the mysterious land inhabited by widowers, old bachelors, cats, and memories.

• • •

A WRITER WHO KEEPS a personal diary uses it to record what he knows. In his poems or stories he sets down what he doesn't know.

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• • •

POETS DON'T PARTICULARLY FEAR the onslaughts of Puritan propagandists or the ferocious attacks that emerge from beneath the pens of their fiction-writing brethren. The ill will of Jansenists, the wrath of philosophers who accuse them of following too flighty a muse: neither can do them much harm. The boundless indifference of ardent TV viewers and fellow passengers on commuter trains is far more dangerous. It's far worse when no one even bothers to denounce them.

• • •

THE ALTE PINAKOTHEK in Munich holds a portrait by the young Spaniard Velázquez; I once spent half an hour in front of that picture. I felt as though I'd just regained my vision; I could see again. I suddenly saw a man who lived in the seventeenth century. A man with a prominent nose (it cast a shadow on his cheek). Enormous eyes. Gloves on both hands, dark garments that bring his face into relief. His face, deep in thought, is neither ugly nor handsome. At a certain point I realized that this young nobleman might really be the devil, hence his exceptional charm (a penitent devil, a devil seized by fleeting doubts. . .).

• • •

ONE OF REMBRANDT'S earliest self-portraits also hangs there. It's very small (only 15.5 centimeters by 12.7), and reveals the sensuous face of a young man who already knows who he is, although he hasn't yet accepted it (in this he resembles Rimbaud—another brilliant boy from northern Europe).

• • •

MOMENTS OF REVELATION are like boundary stones, separated by several hundred yards of no-man's-land. The poet experiences an epiphany in setting down the key line of his latest poem. But days, weeks, even months of shadow stretch between these moments of majestic clarity. And here the poet plays the historian's role, sharing not just his ecstatic humanity with his readers but his dull, dreary, doubting humanity as well.

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• • •

I'M STROLLING THROUGH PARIS. Neither children nor cats pay the slightest attention to me as I mumble bitterly under my breath. Thus is the emigrant's lot. Suddenly I burst out laughing, at myself, at my own exaltation. The children stop short, the cats beat a hasty retreat.

• • •

OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE is shaped by alternating currents of exaltation and demysticization. Since we're now in a period of universal demysticization, we should expect a return to religious dogmatism in the foreseeable future. Which would place me in an awkward situation; I prefer opposing decadence to butting heads with fundamentalists.

• • •

". . .YOU WILL NEVER LOVE art well, till you love what she mirrors better."—John Ruskin.

This doesn't mean that art, and poetry with it, are simply a mirror held up to reality, as the advocates of realism would have it. No, Ruskin has something else in mind: that art springs from the most profound admiration for the world, both seen and unseen. (And also that it isn't just for aesthetes.)

• • •

I LIKE WRITERS AND PHILOSOPHERS who know how to rebel against themselves. For example, when someone asked Maurice Barrès near the end of his life what action he was most ashamed of, he said, "That I always voted for my own party." Barrès, an ardent nationalist, nonetheless remarked in *Mes cahiers* that "*nationalisme manqué d'infini*,"—"nationalism lacks infinity."

• • •

WHY ARE DETECTIVE NOVELS so boring? Because they deal with a single mystery, the simple question of who killed Mr. L. But there's only one real mystery, one real question: What is the world? Fire. Air.

Translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

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THOMAS NOWOTNY

Austria—A Pariah Country

AUSTRIA IS ONE OF THE RICHEST COUNTRIES in the world, ranking as number twelve, just above Germany. Wealth is evenly distributed, and its capital, Vienna, is a city without slums. Unemployment and inflation are low; social services are abundant; public education is first-rate; and the health and pension systems are well funded. Moreover, the cultural life is vivid, civic organizations flourish, and people generously contribute to charities. Crime and use of drugs are lower than in otherwise comparable countries. The population appears politically mature, and the percentage of citizens voting in general elections is high. The media broadly covers political issues. Corruption is relatively low, though Austrians as well as foreigners have criticized what they perceive as all-pervasive clientilism—the system of the so-called "proporz." Still, similar arrangements exist in other "neo-corporate" political systems.

Austria gets the best possible grades from "Freedom House" for effectively safeguarding civic and human rights. Political violence, or violence motivated by racial or ethnic hatred, is rare, and in recent history democracy has not been under threat. Again and again, Austria has accepted a vast number of refugees: its latest large wave came from Bosnia. The foreign population is greater than in any other country of the European Union. Although their integration into the rest of society functions less smoothly, and takes longer than in the United States, Austria shares these difficulties with other European nations.

Because Austria (re-)gained its full independence only in 1955, it is a very new state. This has prompted it to work hard in establishing an identity as a useful member in the club of nations. From 1955 on, Austria participated in the Peace Keeping Operations of the United Nations, and has helped international cooperation. It was prominent in promoting human rights by supporting the first so-called Helsinki process and then its successor organization, the OSCE, and it pushed issues of human rights in the Council of Europe. Moreover, Vienna, in addition to New York and Geneva, is one of the headquarters of the United Nations.

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Why then has the country been made an international pariah? Its fourteen partners in the European Union have decreed that all bilateral political contacts with Austria be suspended. This complicates and even impedes Austria's participation in the decision-making of the Union. Still, the indirect effects of this decision are even more far-reaching and severe; they sanction a generally hostile mood, as well as a drastic loss of image and standing which will affect many fields such as foreign investment, tourism, and cultural exchanges. The damage thus inflicted will be difficult to repair. To do so will take a long time—probably several decades.

How did the decision of the EU fourteen come about? How can their sanctions be justified?

From 1945 to 1966, and again since 1986, Austria was ruled by a "big" coalition between the center-right People's Party (ÖVP), or "the Blacks," who rallied with the Social Democrats (SPÖ), or "the Reds," who swim in the mainstream of the European center-left parties. Ever since 1986, the Blacks had threatened to pull out of this "big" coalition and join the Freedom Party (FPÖ). In 1996, the leader of the ÖVP—now chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel—even triggered new general elections, hoping to obtain enough votes to overtake the SPÖ in order to become head of an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government. The move backfired with losses for the People's Party and gains for the Social Democrats. The "big" coalition between Red and Black survived, but uneasily; the ÖVP continued to search for an end to this "big coalition." In fact, the ÖVP had always maintained the option of forming a coalition with the Freedom Party, and quite flagrantly. Why then did the European Union not react earlier and postpone such reaction until a time when even massive intervention from abroad could no longer change the course of events?

Between 1996 and 1999, the SPÖ made far-reaching and fiscally costly concessions to the ÖVP to keep the coalition alive. But bickering continued right up to the elections on October 3, 1999. Both the Social Democrats and the People's Party lost votes, and the Freedom Party came in second. A fourth party—"the Greens"—gained handsomely. Of the 193 seats in Parliament, 65 went to the SPÖ, 52 each to the ÖVP and the FPÖ, and 14 to the Greens.

The Freedom Party gained, roughly in equal parts, from the Reds and the Blacks—and now has more blue-collar voters than the Social Democrats. The latter lost not only to the Freedom Party, but to an even greater extent to political apathy. Nearly a tenth of its traditional voters did not go to the polls.

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Because the Austrian president Thomas Klestil customarily asks the leader of the strongest party to form the new government, he approached Victor Klima, chairman of the Social Democrats, to start negotiations with the People's Party to form a new coalition government. A coalition between the Social Democrats and the Freedom Party was never on the agenda, due to mutual hostility and to irreconcilable differences. In its electoral campaign, the SPÖ once more had presented itself as the only major political force to prevent the FPÖ from entering government.

Wolfgang Schuessel did not seriously pursue this option of once again sharing power with the SPÖ, since this constellation had brought his party into a continuous decline in the 1960s, when it still had an absolute majority. Now, its share of the votes has been reduced to a mere 27 percent. Thus it was inevitable, even though president Klestil and a majority of voters ardently wished for a renewal of the old coalition, that this initiative would fail.

The president still sought alternatives to the looming coalition between the two right-wing parties. He instructed Victor Klima to investigate the possibilities of a minority SPÖ government the other three parties would tolerate. But in the meantime, the two right-wing parties had started negotiations of their own, and did so without request by the president; their coalition government was sworn in on February 4. The president could not, or would not disguise his distrust and disapproval. The international reaction soon followed, which should not have come as a surprise since already the fourteen other members of the European Union, particularly the French, had been warning them. The first clear warnings began in October of 1999 at the EU summit in Tampere, then in November at the OSCE summit in Istanbul, and once again in December at the EU summit in Helsinki.

On January 31, these warnings were made public when, on behalf of the heads of governments, the Portuguese EU president spelled out a number of sanctions that would hit Austria if the Freedom Party were to participate in a government: bilateral political contacts would stop, Austrian ambassadors would be received only at a working level, and Austrian candidates for international positions would not be supported. But, this explicit warning was not heeded either. On February 1, 2000, Wolfgang Schuessel became chancellor, and power was evenly distributed between the ÖVP and the FPÖ, with the young FPÖ minister, Heinz Grasser, appointed as the key minister of finance.

Therefore, the EU sanctions were put into effect. On February 29, Jörg Haider resigned as leader of the Freedom Party, not because of the

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hostility of the fourteen EU members, but for tactical reasons: he wanted to distance himself from a muddled and inefficient government to sustain his ambitions of eventually becoming head of the federal government. And even after this formal resignation, he has continued to call the shots in his party and direct those who represent it in the government.

The direct effect on the voters of the reaction by the EU members to Austria is ambivalent. Many Austrians resent what they perceive as unwarranted interference of foreign countries, which is bound to strengthen the position of the government. But others—as the two hundred thousand demonstrators proved in the inner city of Vienna on February 18—welcome what they see as the moral foreign support by the EU in their fight against this government.

What are the motives that prompted this strong and highly unusual action of the European Union countries? After all, the Freedom Party was democratically elected—and so far has observed all the rules of democracy. Is it a "neo-Nazi" party? Does it propagate the policies that were once those of Hitler? Does it mobilize its voters with an open invitation to challenge and overthrow the democratic regime? Evidently not. Otherwise, the Austrian courts would have already banned this party.

On the other hand, aren't there several European parties with agendas similar to the one of the FPÖ? They too wish to limit or even halt further immigration. The center-left coalition government in Denmark has, for example, decided on drastic measures to restrict immigration, much more far-reaching than those demanded by Austria's FPÖ. Also, many conservative European parties are strongly in favor of "law and order," and wish the process of European integration to stop where it stands. Even the FPÖ's roots in a nondemocratic past are not unique, as demonstrated by the former Italian fascists or the Communist parties of Italy and France. Why then this turmoil over the FPÖ? Answers must remain tentative, since a clear cause-effect relationship in the realm of human affairs is difficult to establish. Three explanations seem plausible:

1. The Freedom Party poses a more serious challenge to democratic Europe, one more acute and fundamental than other populist, right-wing parties.

2. Austria has a special history, and thus a special responsibility. In context of this history, the anguish about the Freedom Party gains its legitimacy and credibility.

3. A peculiar political situation prevails in Europe that makes the reaction of the EU countries not only possible but plausible.

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To describe the Austrian Freedom Party as "right wing" is problematic, since it garnered more blue-collar votes than the Social Democrats during the last elections. That the Freedom Party does not have a clear operational program helps put it beyond the historic left-right divide. Even its stance on essential issues like the unequal distribution of wealth and income is not clear, since the party is not united by a concrete political program. It is united by its leader. To Haider, concrete programs would be of no use, as they would only limit his potential following. For instance, calling for a redistribution of wealth and income would alienate the richer amongst his adherents.

Instead of specific programs, Haider has provided continuous movement, permanent entertainment, and powerful emotions. His party's natural targets are "small minorities of outsiders" and "vicious enemies." Critical intellectuals are one such group; the politicians of the vilified old "system" are another.

The lack of a clear program is paralleled by the lack of internal party democracy. Haider can do as he pleases. For example, when he decided to get rid of the entire party leadership in one of the nine Austrian states, he simply dismissed them. And he could change the party's positions on such fundamental issues as membership in the European Union without being questioned. Once the most ardent partisan of this membership, he has since become its most vociferous critic.

Of course, a party that is so nondemocratic by necessity raises questions as to whether it can and will sustain and strengthen the democratic state. Having gained cohesion from mobilizing against minorities, it cannot be expected to effectively safeguard the respect for such minorities.

Haider maintains that he is no neo-Nazi. And in many respects that is evident: no jackboots, no black or brown shirts, no overtly racist discourse, no military-style mass gatherings. Instead, he projects a modern style. He is a fashionable young man in designer jeans who drives a Porsche—ever ready for a quotable utterance and for the gaze of television.

Neither is there a direct repeat of Nazi ideology. No openly anti-Semitic remarks have been registered. And aside from a few lapses, Haider has taken great care to avoid anything that might bring him into conflict with Austrian laws that sanction "Wiederbetätigung," that is, the resurrection of Nazi programs.

But on a deeper level, there is a continuity: in the wholesale rejection of the existing political system as inherently rotten and moribund, in the denunciation of political parties as self-serving and illegitimate, in the

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treatment of trade unions as traitors of "true" workers' interest, in the fight against all other mediating institutions of civil society that could limit the powers of an absolute ruler, in the cozying up to the most reactionary elements of the Roman Catholic church, in the denunciation of the core democratic institution of parliament as a mere "theater," in the fanning of distrust and hostility against foreign countries and foreign political leaders, in the promotion of motherhood at the expense of female participation in the labor force, in the ridiculing of modern artists and of modern art, in the cult of a stylized "leader," and in the denunciation of political opponents not just as ill-informed or misguided, but as knowingly and schemingly evil. These attitudes and mechanisms do indeed recall attitudes and mechanisms used so effectively by the Nazis. Given Austria's past, this is alarming.

A decade ago, Austria's past was being scrutinized when Kurt Waldheim was elected Austrian president amid allegations that he was a war criminal. He was not. He simply had not been open about his experiences in the Wehrmacht. When challenged, he said that he had just done "his duty." But can the participation of Austrians in the Wehrmacht be explained or justified as a duty? Was it their country they had been serving? Their cause? What about the Austrians who died in resistance to the Nazi regime? Should they be considered traitors?

This discussion indicated that in the public mind such questions still remained open forty-five years after the end of World War II. Haider now proves that they still have not been answered. Evidently, Austria has not come to terms with its past. Nonetheless, many of the accusations against Austria miss the point.

It is wrong, for instance, to claim that Austria did little or nothing in comparison with Germany to persecute war criminals. True, a disproportionate number of the most notorious Nazi butchers had been Austrians. However, the postwar reaction was severe and in proportion to the size of its population a greater number were punished than in (Western) Germany. It is also not true that there was no restitution of Jewish property that had been confiscated after 1938. In fact, this property was restituted, and rather speedily, although the proceedings were often to the disadvantage of the former owners, and more could have been done to settle some issues (i.e., confiscated art, which was dealt with in three instances, the last time in 1998). The record on general compensation of the victims of persecution remains ambiguous. But it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise.

Austria defines itself as having been the first victim of German aggression. This position is not merely opportunistic, since the victorious allies

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recognized it as well-founded. In fact, the unification with Germany, the "Anschluss," occurred because Austria was invaded by the German army. This invasion was to prevent a referendum on Austrian independence that most likely would have rejected the "Anschluss" by a two-thirds margin. Today it is frequently forgotten that at the time, the Western powers still hoped to "appease" Hitler.

By defining Austria as the first victim of Nazi Germany, the "Anschluss" was declared null and void in 1945; having been under German occupation, Austria was incapable of independent action between 1938 and 1945. This position was not taken in ill faith: among those elected to the first postwar parliament in November of 1945, 70 percent had been inmates of concentration camps.

However, that legal position complicated the question of the compensation of the victims of persecution. If Austria had not existed legally between 1938 and 1945, it also could not be held legally responsible—as a state—for what had happened. As a consequence, there ensued a series of compromises. But the victims of former persecution saw that what was lacking was a moral dimension—a dimension of atonement. All of the actions were merely legal, or at best humanitarian. That—and not primarily the amount of payments—is what makes the crucial difference to what was done by Germany.

According to much of the prevailing international opinion, Austria failed to deal adequately with its Nazi past, while Germany went through a period of intense soul-searching. Here too, the theory of Austria as Hitler's first victim complicates things; it is not easy to grasp that one can very well have been a victim at the same time as having been a—often all-too-willing—part and partner in perpetrating some of the world's most heinous crimes.

This issue has been on the intellectual agenda ever since 1945. In fact, a good part of Austria's remarkable postwar literature deals with nothing else. Few school students had never visited the concentration camp of Mauthausen; this part of the past was also at the core of political education in Austria's secondary schools. Austrian historians have made this their preferred field of research. Public monuments commemorate the victims—the most prominent one stands in a public square right behind Vienna's opera house.

Therefore, foreign criticism does not touch upon the real issue. Austria has not refused to deal with its Nazi past, but segments of Austrian society have refused to do so, and their refusal has remained unchallenged. This segment of society has belittled the sufferings inflicted upon innocent victims, has perceived the deeds of Hitler as nothing worse or

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different than the deeds of Stalin or Churchill, has depicted the Wehrmacht (and occasionally even the SS) as something positive and even heroic, and has interpreted World War II as a fight against Communism; the past has been excused, explained away. In this view, it was thanks to the Wehrmacht and its fighting spirit that the advance from the East was slowed, and that the Western part of the continent was not squeezed under the Communist yoke.

Haider grew up in this segment of Austrian society. There, in 1986, he wrested intra-party power from his more liberal predecessor. It is this worldview that shaped his innermost convictions, and that shimmers through his declarations—at least in unguarded moments. And this is the worldview that makes him so unacceptable to mainstream European politics.

Postwar European politics and European unification is based on a consensus that is the antithesis to Haider's worldview. This consensus implies that the two sides had not operated on the same moral level in World War II; there had been criminals on the one side, and victims on the other. Postwar European politics are shaped by this perspective, and by the resolve to prevent a repetition of the past. Whoever challenges this project challenges Europe's postwar order. Haider does so by, for instance, feigning moral indifference when equating Churchill and Stalin, by praising the Waffen SS, or by equating the suffering of the "Sudetendeutschen" (expelled cruelly by the Czechs after 1945) with that inflicted upon the Jewish population by the Nazis. Obviously, the European reaction to such views has to be strong. It would be disquieting were it otherwise. The parallels to Nazi verbiage and emotions add to this sense of outrage, and present a fundamental challenge. This alone could explain the strong reaction of the members of the European Union. But, in addition, it is due to a specific political constellation prevailing in today's Europe.

The founding fathers of the European Union were mostly Christian Democrats, members of a moderate right, informed and leavened by Christian thought, with personalities like De Gasperi and Adenauer. Now, the Christian Democratic parties are under siege. They are in a decline that threatens all former mass parties, and are being assaulted from their right fringes: the Vlaams Block in Belgium, the Republicans in Germany, the Northern League in Italy, or the parties of Le Pen and of Megret in France. These parties draw political strength from being anti-European and anti-foreigners. Haider's FPÖ belongs to that league. Should the assault by these parties against the Christian Democrats be effective, one of the most important political pillars supporting the unification of

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Europe would be dangerously weakened. Hence the center-right parties must draw a sharp line between themselves and the radical right, and must not allow for anything that could legitimate these movements in the European Union.

The European reaction against the coalition with Haider has to be seen in this perspective: it is directed less against the FPÖ than against the ÖVP and its leader, Wolfgang Schuessel. And it is intended as a warning to all those politicians who, too, might be tempted to gain or preserve power by a coalition with the extreme, and the anti-European right.

There is yet another aspect. The EU is about to expand dramatically over the next years. Negotiations are well on their way with six countries. Other candidate nations will soon begin negotiations. All of these countries are new and untested democracies and therefore have to be kept to clear and strict standards in order not to threaten the EU's cohesion. Thus Austria is "used" to demonstrate what would happen if a certain code of behavior were not respected.

Nonetheless, with this decision on Austria, the EU countries have moved into uncharted and dangerous territory. There is no legal basis for their sanctions. An article recently inserted into the treaty provides for a proceeding that could result in freezing EU membership, but only in case of a "persistent and serious" violation of basic EU principles. Not even the most ardent foes of Haider believe that this article is applicable. Until now, Austria has respected the letter and the spirit of the EU treaty, and is expected to continue to do so.

Therefore, the EU sanctions have not been based on legal, but on political considerations. However, this political base is shaky as well: it is not yet solid enough to support such severe measures. For instance, in Germany, a federated state, the PDS is much disliked because of its roots in the Communist Party of former Eastern Germany. All leading politicians on the center-left and the center-right have warned against any coalition with this party. But that could not prevent forming open or tacit coalitions in any of the *Länder* (states) of the German Federal Republic. Clearly, the political base of the German Federal Republic is not sufficiently strong and coherent to translate and transmit the consensus existing on the federal level into a firm political obligation on the state level.

As of now, the European Union is not yet a federation. The ties binding its members are much weaker than those that unite the various German *Länder*. Yet, since even Germany's central government finds it impossible to prevent a coalition with what it perceives as an extremist party with a dubious past, one should expect that a much weaker

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"government" of the European Union would also lack a political base for excluding a political party from ruling in one of its member countries.

Furthermore, since the action had no legal basis, procedural rules for the decision were lacking as well. Therefore, and due to haste, some rather universal procedural principles were ignored: the accused—in this case Austria—was not given the chance to present its case. The heads of government arrived at their "judgment" in a nontransparent and secret manner. And there is no right to appeal. There is no precedent that might allow either Austria or any of its fourteen EU partners to extricate itself from the situation. Who, for instance, is to monitor the actual behavior of Austria? Who is to judge whether and by what criteria its new coalition government does or does not conform to European standards in its actual politics?

Finally, there is the question of relative power and might. Who would lead the challenge against France if a coalition with a dangerous right-wing party came into power in France? Would the reaction of the other EU countries have been the same? One must wonder whether, even in the highly structured context of European integration, might does not make for right. Size matters. All members are not equal. That is at least the conclusion citizens of smaller EU members like Denmark or Ireland seem to have drawn. This conclusion will weigh as a heavy burden on future attempts to "deepen" European unification. Smaller countries might be tempted to deny support to such ventures.

The action of the fourteen was probably rash. Very likely, they went "a bridge too far." Nonetheless, the motives that prompted them to act as they did were not irrational. Haider's success in Austria is a direct challenge to everything the European Union stands for. Thus the EU was well advised not to ignore this challenge. But it still remains to be seen whether the fourteen were wise to act as they acted, or whether their action was counterproductive.

March 2, 2000

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STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Islamic Fundamentalism in the Balkans

THE JEWISH WOMAN STOOD in the office of Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic. She was distraught. She placed a handful of broken tiles on the desk in front of her and told the president's adviser, "It's a crime, a crime against culture. They are destroying a holy place, a place that is of incalculable value to Sarajevo."

"There's nothing we can do," the adviser replied sorrowfully. "They have the money and they are going to do what they want."

The most interesting aspect of this incident, which took place after the end of the Bosnian war in 1995, is that the temple the Jewish woman, an art expert named Zoja Finci, was attempting to protect was neither, as one might expect, a synagogue, nor a Serbian church. Rather, it was the Begova or Governor's mosque, the largest in the former Yugoslavia, and the main Islamic structure in Sarajevo.

Further, the presumptive vandals against whom Zoja Finci sought to protect the mosque were neither Serb extremists nor commercial developers. They were, in fact, just the sort of people one might have thought would target a synagogue or a Serb structure: Islamic officials backed by Saudi Arabia, engaged in a purported reconstruction.

The official Supreme Saudi Aid Committee occupies one of the largest governmental buildings in the Bosnian capital. The committee has paid for the rehabilitation of numerous mosques damaged during the 1992-95 war. But the aid is not always appreciated by ordinary Muslims, who, no less than art experts, have ways of expressing their resentments.

At the Alipasha mosque in Sarajevo, a lovely Ottoman structure with a slender, graceful minaret, only meters away from the committee's headquarters, the word "Saudi" has been scratched off the commemorative plaque announcing a donation for its restoration.

The problem is that the Saudis and their local agents are Wahhabis, followers of the main fundamentalist sect in the Islamic world. Wahhabis do not approve of Ottoman mosques. Their rehabilitation of the Imperial mosque, also in Sarajevo, turned what had been a beautiful,

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balanced complex of buildings, which seemed to invite entry, into something not much different from a parking garage in a Western city.

In October 1999, the Bosnian weekly *Dani* [*Days*] published an extremely revealing interview with Kemal Zukic, director of the Center for Islamic Architecture in Sarajevo. The interviewer asked Zukic about the wall decorations in the Begova mosque—precisely the panels, the removal of which caused so much anguish to Zoja Finci. He answered, "There were several layers of paintings, so that in the end we were in a quandary about which layer merited preservation. . . .The biggest contribution came from a Saudi donor. . . .Parts remain but most of the walls are now blank."

Pressed as to whether the panels that were removed would be preserved, Zukic answered testily, "I find it really hard to get excited over decorations inside the mosque. We are not in a situation like the more fortunate European nations, such that we could preserve our cultural heritage. . . .That was only an internal decoration and it was not intended to last forever."

Zukic is a graduate in architecture from the University of Sarajevo who has never practiced that profession, but who has produced elaborate plans for new Bosnian mosques. According to one foreign expert who requested anonymity after an interview with Zukic, "His ideas for mosque design involve knockoffs of Saudi-modern shopping mall architecture with odd touches inspired by the décor of the Love Boat, including portholes! He is the very model of the modern zealot, narrow-minded, arrogant, and so dumb he doesn't even realize it."

But at least the Begova mosque's outer walls remained. Elsewhere in Bosnia-Hercegovina, the fundamentalists, away from urban critics, pursue a more aggressive tactic. *Dani* reported that Muslims in the rural town of Vrbovik were angry because they had understood funds had been donated for the reconstruction of their traditional, Ottoman mosque, which was on the front line and was destroyed in the 1992-95 war. But that money was diverted elsewhere, while two new mosques and six smaller prayer structures were erected in the Saudi style. The local Islamic cleric, Hadji Salih Avdukovic, commented angrily, "These people are hypocrites. They want to do everything from scratch."

Dani is a sensationalist organ, but in this instance its reportage was on the mark. Thanks to the seemingly inexhaustible financial resources of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Wahhabis have appeared all over Bosnia-Hercegovina and Kosovo since the bloodshed ended. According to a September 9, 1999 news release by the Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo, out of four million Saudi riyals spent by the committee

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on the ground in Kosovo, nearly half was spent to sponsor 388 religious "propagators" (i.e., missionaries), with the intent of converting Kosovars to Wahhabi fundamentalism.

Another six hundred thousand riyals went for the reconstruction of thirty-seven mosques, and two hundred thousand riyals was spent on two schools. The amount of money involved was fairly modest (four million riyals is a little more than a million U.S. dollars), except when one considers that the Saudis had only been on the scene in Kosovo for a little over two months at that point. It was characteristic that a greater proportion of Saudi aid was spent on fundamentalist "propagators" and on mosque building than on broader humanitarian needs.

Mosque architecture is not the Wahhabis' only interest. Walking the streets of Sarajevo, one might think they have gained considerable influence. Many young men wear "Islamic" beards, and numerous young women have adopted head and shoulder coverings, or *hijab*. The campus of the University of Sarajevo is especially notable for this habit, and a women's store with the amusing name "Hijab Boutique" opened near the old Ottoman market.

As the defaced plaque at the Alipasha mosque demonstrates, the fundamentalists are definitely unpopular with Balkan Muslims. In Sarajevo, *hijab* may be more a fad than anything else—and it certainly has not caught on in Kosovo, although many women wear Balkan head scarves.

There are other things that Balkan Muslims favor, but which Wahhabis disapprove. One is veneration of the dead. In Saudi Arabia itself, fundamentalists have, over the past two hundred years, destroyed all the tombs of the companions of the prophet Mohammed. In Kosovo, the Saudis offered to rebuild several mosques in the area of Vushtrri/Vucitrn, which were destroyed during the 1998-99 fighting. They promised the new mosques would be "better and more Islamic." But first, they said, the Albanian Muslims would have to uproot the Ottoman graveyards nearby.

Andras Riedlmayer, a Harvard University librarian and expert in this field, recalls an incident that took place in the Kosovar town of Peja/Pec.

> I was told about an incident in 1998, when, as the villages in the surrounding Kosovo countryside were in flames, a group of Wahhabi missionaries—both Arabs and their Kosovar acolytes—came to town and tried to impose their own way of praying (the locals said it involved some "odd" body movements).
>
> When the Wahhabis took out sledgehammers and set about

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> smashing the 17th century gravestones in the garden of Peja's ancient Defterdar Mosque, angry local residents beat them up and chased them out of town. I was shown the damaged gravestones, beautifully carved with floral motifs and verses from Qur'an. That was in the late summer of 1998. Six months later, in the spring of 1999, Serb paramilitaries came and burned down the mosque. Unlike the fundamentalist missionaries, they were not interested in the gravestones.

This sort of hard-shell outlook can scarcely appeal to the nationalistic Albanians, who, like their Serb adversaries, consider their graves to be proof of their claim on Kosovo. But fundamentalist proscriptions go on and on. They do not like music, except for the drum. They do not accept Sufism, or mysticism, as a part of Islam. Both of these strictures run counter to Balkan Muslim traditions.

Balkan Muslims are especially devoted to a practice that drives Wahhabis to fury: *mawlid*, or, as it is locally called, *mevlud*, the commemoration of Mohammed's birth. To the fundamentalists, celebrating the prophet's birthday smacks of the Christian-style worship of Jesus. Abdussalam Chouia, a leading spokesman for the so-called Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a body which has spent considerable time harassing the American media over the very use of such terms as "Islamic fundamentalist," professed not even to know what *mevlud* is. "It isn't part of Islam," he insisted.

CAIR members are, to put it delicately, masters at twisting words. The very idea of an organization concerned with "American-Islamic relations," as if all Americans agreed on Islamic issues, as if Muslim citizens of the U.S. were not Americans, and as if the Islamic world were united in a supposed confrontation with America, is absurdly presumptuous. But CAIR has succeeded in intimidating numerous American newspaper editors into a form of political correctness that involves coddling Palestinian and other extremists under the pretext that "American bigotry" threatens Muslims.

In Bosnia-Hercegovina, many Islamic officials dislike fundamentalist activities but are reluctant to denounce them. The Bosnians are avid for the money. Only a few local Sufis have strongly criticized Wahhabi missionizing, arguing that the long presence of Sufi spiritualism in the Balkans is incompatible with fundamentalist fanaticism. In the end, Balkan Muslims are desperate to be viewed as European, and submission to the will of the Wahhabis will certainly do nothing to advance that agenda.

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Kosovo Albanian Muslims have been more forthright in airing their irritabilities on this issue. After all, they do not need the money. The Kosovars have a large emigration that supports their various reconstructive activities, and, in addition, the Kosovo Albanians are far more enterprising than the Bosnians. This is also an incentive for the Kosovars to express greater independence from those in the international community who seek to use a kind of "aid blackmail" to get the Albanians to do what they want. For example, Albanians are inclined to rebuild their homes themselves, rather than, as is the Bosnian habit, wait for the UN or Europe or the U.S. to do it for them.

In one of the more surprising recent developments in Kosovo, the fundamentalists came under verbal fire from the Kosovapress news agency, universally considered to be the media arm of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Kosovapress declared:

> For more than a century civilized countries have separated religion from the state. [However], we now see attempts not only in Kosovo but everywhere Albanians live to introduce religion into public schools. . . .Supplemental courses for children have been set up by foreign Islamic organizations who hide behind assistance programs. Some radio stations. . .now offer nightly broadcasts in Arabic, which nobody understands and which lead many to ask, are we in an Arab country? It is time for Albanian mosques to be separated from Arab connections and for Islam to be developed on the basis of Albanian culture and customs.

Dr. Rexhep Boja, president of the mainstream Islamic Community of Kosovo, expressed himself similarly, stating boldly that Albanian Muslims had followed their faith for more than five hundred years and did not need anybody to teach them how to be Muslims or how to decorate their mosques.

Nevertheless, the Wahhabis are making much greater inroads in Kosovo than in Bosnia-Hercegovina—notwithstanding Albanian tetchiness and the fashion addiction of Kosovar Albanian women, which makes *hijab* a rare sight indeed. Here, too, it has to do with elemental requirements. The Bosnians lack financial resources but they do not want for books or trained imams. The Kosovar Albanians do not need money but they have a thirst for books and a shortage of clerics. Many of the latter now go to the Saudis for training.

But the locals are not the only people concerned about the infiltration of Wahhabis in the Balkans. In Albania, as well as Bosnia-Hercegovina

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and Kosovo, anxiety over the activities of Bin Ladin supporters has led American diplomats to entrench themselves behind high, thick walls observing exceptional security measures at their embassies and other diplomatic facilities.

At the end of March, a group of Saudi "aid workers" was rousted by UN police from a building in Prishtina, accused of surveilling foreign vehicles, presumably in preparation for a terrorist attack. A representative of the Saudis, one Al Hadi, complained that the telephone in the building where they resided had been tapped.

The upshot of this situation was visible in the first week of April, when Prishtina saw a spectacle unheard of in Sarajevo. A massive fundamentalist "cultural program" was held in the local sports stadium to celebrate the beginning of the Muslim new year. Thousands of Albanian Muslims, young and old, walked away from the event happily clutching works in Albanian that professed Wahhabi fanaticism. In May, the familiar Saudi Joint Relief Committee laid the foundation of a multimillion dollar cultural, sports, and religious center in the Kosovo capital.

Is there a solution to this problem? Surely there is, but it is ignored by the foreign authorities in Kosovo. Albanians in the region include a considerable Catholic minority, with a distinguished cultural legacy, as well as thousands of followers of heterodox Islamic sects such as the Bektashis, who drink alcohol and follow a kind of Islamic Unitarianism.

In the city of Gjakova/Djakovica, for example, Bektashis and Catholics far outnumber Sunni Muslims. Both the former groups merit assistance in such matters as education, care of orphans, and the reconstruction of destroyed religious architecture. But the foreigners pay no attention to such details. They contemptuously dismiss the Catholics as too few, and know nothing of the Bektashis. Somewhere down the road, however, the consequences of such cultural obliviousness could be disastrous.

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DOMINIQUE SCHNAPPER

Memory in Politics

During my research on the Jews of France more than twenty years ago, a livestock dealer in Lorraine, whose family had nearly all been deported, made a deep impression on me with a remark: "All must be forgiven—but nothing forgotten." I was won over to this moral stance, which I heard then for the first time, as it combined the imperative of faithfulness to the victims with the willingness to relinquish all desire for revenge; my interlocutor was practicing Paul Ricoeur's "amnesty without amnesia." That the executioners have never asked for forgiveness, and that the survivors have never been in a position to grant pardon where none has been asked, only reinforces the moral position of the Thionville livestock dealer.

But historical collectivities, whether they are organized as nations or otherwise, are not individuals, and are not subject to the same moral rules relied upon quite instinctively by individuals. Politics is a dirty business. The obligation of memory within politics must be different from its counterpart in the realm of the individual. "Life goes on," says the tag (so repugnant to one who has just lost a loved one); there is no "end of history." Powerful political figures, even when not deliberately manipulating collective memory, not destroying archives, or willfully making truth into travesty, nonetheless perpetuate and always use collective memory to construct the future; this may be deplorable but is no cause for outrage. Memory in political life obviously has a political function.

Memory is inseparable from all historical collectivity, whether it is a nation or a particular group. A society without history would not be human. We know that nations are the historians' invention: it was they who worked actual circumstances into the glorious birth of the great Western democracies, the birth of the state of Israel amid tragedy, and the myth of the freedom of Europe's smaller nations. In the age of nations and of triumphant nationalisms, the catalogue of past events, established through scholarship, was used to affirm collective identity and to encourage the living society, ordain heirs to this glorious history, extend the heritage of the past, and concern itself with common action. Gérard Namer has shown how a dual Gaullist/Communist memory

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established itself in 1945 as a means of legitimizing the *nouveau régime* by a systematic and organized transformation of recent historic events. On the one side, there was Gaullist France, which since June 18, 1940 had been the sole incarnation of France—all of France—legislatively and politically voiding all that had transpired there. On the other side, there was the Communist Party, which was the party of the executed, resisting the advance of Nazism from the very first moments—so the line went—as if the Party were not merely resisting in the wake of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, as if the German-Soviet Pact of August 1939 had not contributed to France's defeat. This is a complex double myth whose two halves were wedded to one another, to buttress the legitimacy of the New Republic.

To take another, particularly sensitive example: would the great European powers have accepted the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 had they not realized (though late) the extent of the tragedy of the Shoah? There is no taboo against advancing the notion, painful and shocking as it may be, that the collective management of the memory of the Shoah in Israel—the national minute of silence, the pilgrimages to Yad Vashem—functioned to legitimate morally Israel's existence. The survival of the Jewish people in a national form became, after Hitler's will to eliminate it, a moral imperative serving to justify a special political project.

The group known as the Harkis is another victim of political management of memory: victims of a veritable historical trap whose very existence was denied by two national memories. Gaullist France of the Fifth Republic repressed its consciousness of the entire colonial project, in particular the "Dirty War" which should have never been fought, in order that France would be free to exercise her sovereignty in the international order as the sole entity worthy of her own glory—and of de Gaulle's. The FLN, for its part, established the legitimacy of the new independent Algeria by comparing the war waged from 1954 to 1962 with the resistance of the French people to Nazi oppression—and indeed with that of all peoples struggling for their independence in the face of imperial powers. The Harkis, living witnesses to the colonial war in French eyes and traitors to the Algerians, were condemned by the construction of two national memories. Some were massacred in Algeria without any intervention from the French Army still there, while the survivors, shipped to the other side of the Mediterranean often in contravention of orders, were received in France with hostility—a legacy whose social and moral consequences some of their children and grandchildren still endure.

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When the task of memory is too often invoked or imposed, it can work in ways that are perverse, in the sociological sense. Historical collectivities also have a need to forget. How can we deny that the memory of Nazi horrors has prevented us from clearly recognizing and analyzing those of other totalitarianism of the twentieth century? Even today—at least in France—comparisons between them can be taken as scandalous. Must we truly remind ourselves that the very act of comparison implies the notion of difference? If Nazi totalitarianism were identical to its Soviet counterpart, there would be no call to compare them; it is precisely because there were differences as well as similarities between them that a comparison may be instructive, both intellectually and politically. The memory of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis impedes us even to this day from clear analysis of that undertaken by Communists. If we define genocide as the massacre of individuals because of who they are rather than because of what they have done, then the murder of the kulaks or the bourgeois is no different in nature from the murder of the Jews. Can one help being born into a bourgeois family? In the still-valid formulation of Anne Apfelbaum, one memory contains another hidden within it.

If the memory of Nazi genocide, rightly perpetuated for decades by Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers, Jewish institutions, and the state of Israel, continues to prevent us from comprehending the nature of the Communist system, this does not mean that it should keep us today from assimilating the massacres in the former Yugoslavia or in Rwanda. The trials of the last surviving war criminals or collaborators of the Vichy regime should not prevent us from resisting those who continue to undermine the rule of law, in France or elsewhere. We have sympathy and affection for those "fools of memory" for having undergone struggles that give their lives a tragic nature, or because their parents underwent such struggles and they take these on out of a sense of loyalty. Politically though, we must not fight only an already-defeated enemy while remaining blind to what is happening before our eyes. History moves on, and evil takes new forms. There is no call to ignore new incarnations of evil in the name of memory or to obscure the dangers of the moment—even the most justified of memories. The dead must not prevent the living from carrying on with their lives.

There is also, in the words of Renan, in the style of his age, an obligation to forget. Forgetting is necessary and inevitable; every historic nation was conceived in violence. Nations are born of wars and of the submission of various peoples to a common authority, but does this mean we should review the events of thirteenth-century Occitany and

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call into question the participation of their distant descendants (real or supposed) in the society that developed from that particular passage in history? Occitany's fate should be the subject of history and of reflection; there is no reason that this memory would motivate collective action unless through force of political manipulation.

Collective memory inevitably becomes political—though this does not preclude a moral dimension. Democratic nations all refer to a certain set of values, without necessarily adhering to them. Once the citizenry establishes the legitimacy of the political order and sets up a societal bond, the values aspired to—the fundamental dignity of all individuals—become the most objective component of social reality and political life. This is what Germany's dual experience shows us. The former West Germany has acknowledged its Nazi past, while East Germany fed on the myth that all Nazis were West Germans and that East Germans were thoroughly innocent. The West Germans became democrats, while those in the East are even today discovering their own Nazi past, a discovery that is becoming a part of their identity. It is worrisome that a debate on the nature of real communism has not begun, either in the Western democracies or in those formerly under Communist dictatorship. What is worse, those who broach the subject are still delegitimized and treated as morally suspect. How can we not be stunned that anti-anti-Communism remains, in contemporary France, a position that is called, in another national context, "politically correct"?

Decades-long repression in France of the memories of Vichy is undoubtedly behind the recent stream of writings and debates on this subject. By contrast, when will the memory of the Algerian War be released from its repression? Ultimately it will be this that allows us to recognize the fate of the Harkis for what it was. We can only render homage to President Chirac for his solemn recognition of the role of the French State in the deportation of the Jews. When will the conduct of the Fifth Republic government in the Harkis' tragedy be similarly recognized? When will the Communist experience become the object of moral and political scrutiny for our generation?

Collective debates on the past provide the grounding for a democracy, whose obligation is to willfully acknowledge its mistakes, faults, or crimes. Politics, too, has a moral dimension. To acknowledge one's past—not in its entirety, which is impossible, but that part of it which still exerts its force on the present—is one of the preconditions for a working democracy.

Translated from the French by Jim Tucker

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ELIZABETH DALTON

Sex and Race in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys, in life apparently a quite unpolitical person, has become since her death a star of the feminist and postcolonial canon. In particular, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Rochester's mad Creole wife, is now discussed primarily in terms of postcolonialism and the politics of race. The novel's depiction of racial tension and violence in the West Indies, derived partly from Rhys's own childhood and family history in Dominica, offers the basis for this kind of reading and for the debate over the author's sympathies in the racial conflict. What tends to be left out of the political focus, however, is virtually everything that appeals to the imagination and the emotions: the vivid, dreamlike atmosphere, the poignant account of childhood trauma and loss, the disturbingly masochistic sexuality.

Literature inevitably contains unconscious motifs and fantasies, but the traces are especially evident in this passionate novel, above all in the treatment of race and its connection with sex. The concern with racial identity and the fears and fantasies of miscegenation that pervade *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be interpreted psychoanalytically as well as politically. At the heart of the novel is an extraordinary scene of repressed sexual desire, a revelation that embodies a myth of origin not only for the heroine but for her Creole society as well. The political dimension of the text is complicated and rendered ambiguous by these unconscious fantasies and fears.

Rhys's novel recounts the early life of Antoinette Bertha Mason, here called Antoinette Cosway before her adoption by Mr. Mason. The Cosways are Creole planters, former slave-owners ruined by emancipation. Hated by the blacks, these "old-time white people" are also, paradoxically, despised as "white niggers" by the more recent English colonists because of their long intimacy with blacks. The lush, overgrown garden of Coulibri, the Cosways' estate, is a microcosm of the moral and sexual ambiguities of their situation, a kind of corrupted Eden: "the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. . .a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell." Recalled often in dream and memory, the garden is rich in symbolic overtones: "Orchids flourished

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out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves, hanging from a twisted root." Like the organs of some creature midway between plant and animal, these orchids, alluring and repellent, hint at forbidden fruit, the crossing of barriers, and an unruly fecundity. They hang from "a twisted root"—perhaps that of Creole society itself in its original sins of slavery and sexual exploitation.

The masochistic sexuality of the heroine has its own twisted roots in her childhood at Coulibri. Rejected by both whites and blacks, she suffers an even deeper injury from her mother, whose love she loses to an afflicted younger brother. This loss is evoked in a poignant image: "Once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe." But now, "she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word. . . .She wanted to sit with Pierre."

Antoinette's experience here is that of many a little girl rejected in favor of a brother; unconsciously the child attributes this rejection to a catastrophic defect in herself and her own body. In *Black Sun*, her study of depression, Julia Kristeva writes that the loss of a love object is experienced by a woman as castration: "such a castration starts resonating with the threat of destruction of the body's integrity, the body image, and the entire psychic system as well."

The account of Antoinette's childhood contains many suggestions of this sort of mutilation. The male power of the family has been cut off by the death of the father, followed by the suicide of their only male friend and protector, and then by the poisoning of the mother's horse. Later the mother's second husband, Mr. Mason, clips the wings of her pet parrot. Frightening allusions to cutting and dismemberment appear in Antoinette's fantasies about the Obeah rituals practiced by her nurse, Christophine: "a dead man's dried hand. . .a cock with its throat cut. . . . Drop by drop the blood was falling." On the night when vengeful blacks set fire to Coulibri, Antoinette wishes "that I were very young again, for then I believed in my stick." This stick was just a pet piece of wood, but it had great significance: "I believed that no one could harm me when it was near me, to lose it would be a great misfortune." But this misfortune occurs: having lost her primitive confidence in her mother's love and in her own body, the girl sees herself as vulnerable, imperfect, castrated.

Antoinette's sense of herself as damaged goods also appears in her friendship with the black girl Tia. Here the motifs of racial impurity—the idea of the "white nigger"—and the impurity of the damaged female

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body are inextricably connected. The story of the relationship with Tia is also a symbolic account of Antoinette's traumatic passage through puberty and her assumption of a soiled and damaged female sexuality. Tia is a kind of double, at once the black part of Antoinette's divided identity and a fantasied other self through whom she might pass over into the feared and envied black majority. But the friendship ends in a quarrel at a forest pool, with overtones of sexual and racial humiliation and a foretaste of death. With Antoinette's few pennies as the stake, Tia bets her that she can't do an underwater somersault, then refuses to acknowledge that she's done it. "Tia laughed and told me that it certainly look like I drown dead that time. Then she picked up the money." Antoinette calls Tia "cheating nigger," and Tia insults her back, saying "Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger." She makes off with Antoinette's clean dress, leaving her own soiled one behind.

The challenge of the underwater somersault may be seen as a promise of metamorphosis: immersion in water, as in baptism, signifies the death of the old self and the birth of the new. If Antoinette could do the somersault to Tia's satisfaction, perhaps she would emerge from the pool cleansed of her alienating whiteness, reborn black like her friend. But of course this does not happen. To get rid of her white self, Antoinette would literally have to "drown dead." Tia laughs at her for even trying. Paradoxically, she jeers at Antoinette for being her friend and thereby compromising further her precarious status as a white person. "Real white people, they got gold money," says Tia, "nobody see them come near us."

Back at Coulibri wearing Tia's soiled dress, Antoinette is laughed at again, this time by white people, her mother's elegant English visitors. Her mother, French via Martinique but "no white nigger either," refuses even to look at her. "She is ashamed of me," thinks Antoinette, "what Tia said is true."

The incident with the dress has sexual as well as racial implications. To be robbed of one's clothes, laughed at, and made to feel dirty, would be a severe social and sexual humiliation at any age, but perhaps especially for a pubescent girl. Moreover, a dress is an image of the female body, a kind of second skin that both conceals and reveals, manifesting sexual status and desirability; indeed the dress—this one and others—is a recurrent trope in the novel. In putting on the dirty dress of a black girl, Antoinette is putting on her status. What seemed acceptable and even attractive in Tia means degradation and ridicule for Antoinette. Her mother has the dress burned, as if it carried the contagion of blackness.

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But the damage is already done: Antoinette has been contaminated by the soiled dress, representing not only her identification with Tia but also her family's ambiguous status and her own outcast condition as a girl unloved by her mother, therefore dirty, damaged, and unlovable.

The relationship with Tia reaches its violent climax on the night of the burning of Coulibri. Catching sight of Tia in the black mob, Antoinette runs to her as if to a part of herself: "We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her." Once again she tries to resolve her divided identity by somehow fusing herself with Tia, and again this is impossible. Tia throws a stone at her, wounding her forehead. "We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself, like in a looking-glass."

For some weeks after the fire, Antoinette lies ill and unconscious, perhaps signaling the onset of another kind of unconsciousness—that of repression. When she wakes up, she has indeed lost touch with something. With the separation from Tia, she is cut off from the "blackness" in herself—the innocent dirt and animality of childhood. The mingled racial world in which she has grown up has included intimacy and love as well as hatred. Now blackness and whiteness are sharply severed in her and what survives is mutilated and incomplete.

Moreover, the wound on her forehead may also signify the transformation of puberty. According to the chronology of the novel, Antoinette is about thirteen at this point. The bleeding wound suggests not only the severance from Tia and the childhood world of Coulibri, but also the bloody event that marks the end of childhood for every girl. When Antoinette regains consciousness with a bandaged head, she worries about having a scar, but her Aunt Cora reassures her, saying, "It won't spoil you on your wedding day." The illness, the blood, the bandage, the fear of bodily imperfection, and the doubts about the wedding day—all suggest menstruation, with its unconscious link with castration. And in fact, the first thing Antoinette sees on waking from her illness is her cut-off braid: "I saw my plait tied with red ribbon. . . .I thought it was a snake."

The cut-off hair also echoes another severance—that from the mother, whose hair once enclosed the daughter in safety; now the daughter's hair is cut off. Antoinette's mother has broken down into madness after the fire and the death of her son. When Antoinette visits her, the mother flings her away, looking only for Pierre. With this renewed rejection in favor of the brother, Antoinette's sense of insufficiency is confirmed. Involved in this damaged sense of herself is the black girl in the dirty dress, a link that persists even in repression.

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Concerns with sex, race, and the female body reappear in one of the most disturbing episodes in the novel, the scene in which Antoinette is harassed on her way to school by two bullies, a boy and a girl:

> The boy was about fourteen and tall and big for his age, he had a white skin, a dull ugly white covered with freckles, his mouth was a negro's mouth and he had small eyes, like bits of green glass. He had the eyes of a dead fish. Worst, most horrible of all, his hair was crinkled, a negro's hair, but bright red, and his eyebrows and eyelashes were red. The girl was very black and wore no head handkerchief. Her hair had been plaited and I could smell the sickening oil she had daubed on it.

Up to this point, blacks have been presented as variously appealing or frightening, but never as physically repellent. This unknown pair, however, provoke a kind of uncanny horror and revulsion. And yet they are perhaps not entirely unknown.

In the menacing black girl, there are echoes of Tia. After the fire, Tia disappears from the narrative, suggesting that the identification with her is repressed. In this encounter, that repressed identification seems to come back in the form of a persecutor. Like Tia, the girl can be seen as a double of Antoinette, here transformed, after the crisis of adolescence, into a sort of negative anti-self—the feared and despised aspects of the female body projected outwards in the person of a bad-smelling black girl.

The final confrontation with Tia was above all visual: "I saw Tia. . . . I looked at her and saw her face. . .we stared at each other. . . .I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass." In contrast, the bad-smelling girl says to Antoinette, "Why you won't look at me. . . .You don't want to look at me, eh, I make you look at me." This girl too is a reflection of Antoinette, but one she is afraid to look at. What drew her to Tia has become ugly and frightening in the dark mirror of the unconscious.

Even more terrifying than the girl is her companion, not only because he is sexually threatening—"You wait," he says, "one day I catch you alone"—but because of the way he looks. What seems so dreadful is an apparent anomaly: the boy is literally white, even freckled and red-haired; yet at the same time he is somehow *not* white. The boy is probably an albino, or perhaps a person of mixed race, descended like many West Indians from the encounters of Scottish and English slaveholders such as Antoinette's father with black or mulatto women. In either case, the disproportionate horror he inspires in Antoinette may come from his being in a sense the very thing she herself has been called, a "white nigger," and

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thus still another double, a disturbing image of her own anomalous status, and also an unsettling hint that white skin is no guarantee of unmixed ancestry. In "The Uncanny," Freud writes that the double embodies the return of the repressed. In the revulsion inspired by the boy and his companion, there is indeed something uncanny—the mingled dread and sense of familiarity that mark an encounter with repressed aspects of the self.

The incident with the boy and girl has a dreamlike vividness and sense of portent; in fact, Rhys tried for a time to write the whole novel as the protagonist's dream, and three dreams remain in the final version. The most significant occurs several years after the fire, toward the end of Part I. Antoinette is boarding at a convent school, "a place of sunshine and of death" full of reminders of the dangers of female sexuality: the crypt holds the body of a fourteen-year-old saint named Innocenzia, and the girls hear of virgin martyrs and of "that flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended." Into this atmosphere of desperate repression comes a visit from Antoinette's stepfather, Mr. Mason, who hints at the arrival of a potential suitor from England.

That night, Antoinette dreams she is back at Coulibri, wearing a long white dress that she fears soiling, being led toward the forest by a man whose face is "black with hatred." Sick with dread, she follows him: "I make no effort to save myself. . . .This must happen." She is led into a garden and thinks, "It will be when I go up these steps." Stumbling on her dress, she holds onto a tree, which "sways and jerks" until the dream ends.

The dream foretells the coming of Rochester and the loss of virginity. The fear of soiling the white dress makes clear the meaning of the exchange of dresses with Tia: to put on female sexuality is to be soiled and degraded, yet "This must happen." The garden in the dream is like that of Coulibri, but "the trees are different trees." The tree of life of the childhood Eden has become another kind of tree, a throbbing, jerking phallus, as the sexual act is finally accomplished in an atmosphere of fear and fatality.

The masochistic excitement of the dream is associated with indirect allusions to race and color, as if sex itself were somehow black: Antoinette's dress will be soiled like that of a black girl, and the face of the man is "black with hatred," connecting sex and race, desire and contempt. He may represent not only Rochester, who will both desire and hate her, but also the red-haired boy, the mob that burned Coulibri, the black man who will later be seen to dominate her mother. In this charged atmosphere, color has become the marker not only of conflict,

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but of difference, of meaning itself. The ambivalence of desire has become inseparable from racial attraction and repulsion, just as the division within the self is experienced in racial terms as the split between Antoinette and Tia.

In Part II of the novel, the narration passes from Antoinette to Rochester, although the man in Rhys's novel is not Charlotte Brontë's attractively turbulent hero, but a conventional upper-class Englishman very like male characters in Rhys's other fiction—hypocritical, coldly seductive, and fundamentally cruel. He is frightened of the place—"Not only wild, but menacing"—and repelled by the people: "I wouldn't hug and kiss them," he protests when Antoinette kisses Christophine, "I couldn't." Significantly, he criticizes Christophine for soiling her long dress by letting it trail on the floor: "it is not a clean habit." But despite his inhibitions, he is aroused by his wife's beauty and sensuality: "very soon, she was as eager for what is called loving as I was—more lost and drowned afterwards." The metaphor of drowning recalls the underwater somersault—"sure look like I drown dead that time"—and suggests the self-annihilating quality of Antoinette's erotic response.

Rochester treats her with lust unmediated by tenderness: "One day the sight of a dress she'd left lying on the bedroom floor made me breathless and savage with desire. When I was exhausted I turned away from her and slept, still without a word or a caress." The dress, separated from the woman herself, is emblematic of an empty and alienated desire.

In the honeymoon house, the couple are dangerously free. "Here I can do as I like," says Antoinette. Increasingly they liberate the dark undercurrents of sex, the sadistic and masochistic impulses held in its precarious equilibrium. For Antoinette, sexual surrender merges with the attraction to death that has haunted her since her childhood losses. "Say die and I will die," she whispers during sex, seeming to make herself dependent on Rochester for her very existence, as the child once depended on her mother. The marriage shows the deadly working of the repetition compulsion; with her husband Antoinette experiences again the coldness and contempt of that first love. To the girl convinced that she is damaged and dirty, a "white nigger," contempt and abuse mean love; they make her feel desired for what she really is. "Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness," Rochester writes. "Not close. The same."

This strange idyll is interrupted by a letter from Daniel Cosway, a man who claims to be the son of Antoinette's father by a black woman—"half-way house, as we say"—and thus Antoinette's half-brother. In the

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letter and a later visit, Daniel informs Rochester about Antoinette's family—"the bad blood she have from both sides." The story Daniel tells is one of drunkenness, miscegenation, and inherited madness—in other words, the standard nineteenth-century view of the "degeneracy" of the white Creole. Antoinette's mother is "a raging lunatic and worse besides"; her father was "a shameless man," with innumerable slave concubines and half-caste children. (Although Antoinette later disputes these allegations, they accord with gossip she overheard as a child.) As Rochester leaves him, Daniel says "Give my love to your wife—my sister. . . .Pretty face, soft skin, pretty colour—not yellow like me. But my sister just the same."

Outside Daniel's house, Rochester is transfixed by something he sees: "a black and white goat. . .was staring at me and for what seemed minutes I stared back into its slanting yellow-green eyes." Symbol of lust, the goat with its mixed colors seems to stand for the sexual license of the men of Cosway's class and for the mixed race they produced. Their offspring can be of any color, as Daniel suggests: yellow like him, brown like the beautiful servant Amélie, white like the red-haired boy, perhaps even the "pretty colour" of Antoinette. This thought has already occurred fleetingly to Rochester: "Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either." Now he notices a resemblance between Antoinette and Amélie: "Perhaps they are related," he thinks. "It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place."

A similar suspicion is adumbrated in *Jane Eyre* in the description of Mrs. Rochester. Although the race of "the Creole" is never specified, the lurid glimpses of her are pointedly suggestive: Jane sees "a discoloured face. . .a savage face," "fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments," "lips swelled and dark." Rochester alludes to "the risks, the horrors, the loathings of incongruous unions." It seems unlikely that he would knowingly have married a woman of mixed race; the implication, therefore, is that even within the white Creole there lurks a germ of blackness, acquired through some secret impurity of the bloodline or perhaps, magically, through long proximity.

In Rhys's novel, Daniel Cosway's revelations cause Rochester to shun his wife's bed, driving Antoinette to seek an Obeah love charm from Christophine. The aphrodisiac works all too well, leaving Antoinette with bruises and a torn nightdress. But she is evidently not put off, quite the contrary: Christophine tells Rochester that what happened "make her love you more." For Antoinette, violence is intimacy, a confirmation of her own sense of herself as damaged, soiled, a "white nigger." But

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Rochester, horrified by what he has discovered about himself, takes revenge on his wife by going to bed with the servant who resembles her. The next morning, looking at Amélie, he thinks, "Impossible. And her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought."

Amélie is another of Antoinette's dark doubles, and Rochester's ambivalence toward her parallels his feelings for his wife. He is repelled by the idea that Antoinette might have the fateful drop of black blood; yet unbeknownst to him, the love charm that excites him comes out of the heart of blackness—the hut in the forest where the "blue-black" Christophine does her Obeah magic.

Rochester's mingled repulsion and attraction for both Amélie and his wife echo Antoinette's own conflicted feelings about the possibility of blackness in herself: she both wants to be black and fears that in fact she might be. This paradox in turn grows out of ambivalence toward the elements represented for Antoinette, and indeed more generally for the Western imagination, by blackness: sex, dirt, animality, both the vitality and the violence of nature. The fact that these are largely projections of the content of the unconscious itself does not diminish their power—on the contrary. Blackness and all it represents is both frightening and irresistible. In his encounter with Amélie, perhaps even in his relationship with Antoinette, Rochester is tasting the guilty pleasures of old Mr. Cosway and the other slave-owners with their concubines: the forbidden fruit in the West Indian paradise is interracial sex.

All these strands of race and sex are tied together in one powerful scene involving Antoinette's mother, and thus Antoinette herself. In the series of doubles embodying the different aspects of Antoinette's fragmented being, the most important is her mother, whose name—Annette—resembles her daughter's, and whose fate—drunkenness, madness, confinement—prefigures Antoinette's. In Daniel Cosway's story, the mother is "a raging lunatic and worse besides"—the "worse besides" evidently something so shameful that even he is unwilling to name it. On the night of the love charm, however, Antoinette tells Rochester the story of her mother's final degradation.

After the fire and the death of Pierre, Mr. Mason put the mother in the care of a colored couple. Antoinette goes to their house one day and hears crying; thinking her mother is being hurt, she runs onto the veranda and sees her mother inside: "I remember the dress she was wearing—an evening dress cut very low, and she was barefooted. There was a fat black man with a glass of rum in his hand. He said 'Drink it and you will forget.' She drank it without stopping." As Antoinette watches, the man lifts her mother up and kisses her. "I saw his mouth

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fasten on hers and she went all soft and limp in his arms and he laughed."

This scene depicts the nightmare of whites in a society based on racial hierarchy: the violation of a white woman by a black man. The mother's degradation is evidently the culminating act of revenge on the owners of Coulibri: the white mistress, now broken and defenseless, is used as black women were used by their white masters. This account of the scene, however, leaves out its most disturbing aspect—the voluptuousness of the mother's response: she goes "all soft and limp" under the black man's kiss. The degrading details—the mother's captive, drunken, disheveled state and the man's coarse appearance—seem to contribute to that voluptuousness. The coercive circumstances appear not to force the mother against her own desire, but rather to allow her to give way to it. Her self-annihilating submissiveness is like that of Antoinette when she says to Rochester, "Say die and I will die." There is also an interesting slip or substitution: the mother's caretaker is originally referred to as "coloured"—mulatto—rather than "black," a distinction carefully maintained throughout the text. Here the man has become black, as though to intensify the outrage.

This scene, recounted by Antoinette years after it happens as though it were a dream, a nighttime flash of childhood memory or fantasy, has familiar meaning in psychoanalytic terms. The unseen child observer, the sexual embrace, the mother's cries, and the child's idea that the mother is being hurt all mark this as a sadomasochistic primal scene—the child's archetypal fantasy of sex between the parents as a scene of cruelty. Its most striking feature is the presence of the black man. The figures in such a fantasy need not be the real parents, but since Antoinette's real mother appears, why not her real father? The father's replacement by the black man may reflect the pervasive doubt about race and paternity in a Creole society. There is a kind of childish logic here: the father had many black women and mulatto children; here the mother has a black man—and if this one, why not others before him? (Indeed Christophine says "he take her whenever he want. . . .That man and others.") And why not a child? The child's speculations about its own begetting are shaped here by the sexual and racial fears of her society, creating a primal scene that confirms Antoinette's notion of herself as "white nigger."

This is also, perhaps, a scene of founding or origin, not only for Antoinette but for her society. The varicolored Creole population originated mostly in sexual encounters between whites and blacks—although not of the kind depicted here, but rather between white men

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and black women. But what matters in this case is not historical reality but fantasy, both individual and social. Just as Antoinette is presumably the daughter of old Cosway and not of a black man, so too the origin of the colored population could be shown more accurately by an encounter between a white man like Cosway and a black slave concubine. But that scene would have nothing like the shocking force of this one. It would simply show the kind of nominally illicit sexual activity that poses no threat to the social structure.

A white man does not really degrade himself with a black woman, because the male is assumed to dominate the female as white dominates black. But a white woman who submits willingly to sex with a black man is seen as degrading her race as well as herself. And the possible result—pregnancy and a child of mixed race—is harder to hide and presents a greater threat to the "purity" of the white racial line than does the by-blow of a man. Had the kind of scene depicted here occurred more often in real life, white separateness and supremacy would soon have disappeared, along with white pretensions to moral superiority.

Thus this is a subversive scene of origin, a representation of what must *not* happen. It contains the one truly forbidden sin in this corrupt Creole paradise, and therefore in a sense its cornerstone, the fundamental taboo on which it is structured. The attraction of white men to black and brown women is openly acknowledged and everywhere evident in light-skinned offspring of uncertain paternity. The corresponding attraction of white women to black men must be entirely repressed. (Referring to this subject in a letter, Rhys writes "The men did as they liked. The women—*never*.") In a society founded on white hegemony, the act suggested in this scene is the most degrading and anarchic—and thus the most erotically charged, the most capable of liberating repressed desire.

The scene of the mother with the black man is at the heart of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in some sense a scene of origin for the novel itself, containing its central motifs of race and sex and the connection between them. Here the sexual domination inherent in slavery is represented, but with the races of the parties reversed, as if in fulfillment of an unconscious wish. The combined horror and excitement derive from this idea of eroticized enslavement, in which elements of sexual fantasy and historical reality converge. In a society barely beyond slavery, the sadistic and masochistic aspects of sexual feeling find ready to hand a pattern, a relationship, a vocabulary of images. The sadomasochistic primal scene becomes identified with a social institution in which sex is a transaction between masters and slaves. Female sexual pleasure is

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seen as enslavement, and powerlessness and submission are imagined as erotically exciting.

The relationship between slave and master is suggested throughout the novel in various forms. It appears, for instance, in the marriage of Antoinette's mother with Mr. Mason, to whom she sells herself to save her family from destitution. There is a powerful image of the mother bent backward in Mason's arms, her long hair touching the floor, that suggests the same voluptuous submissiveness that appears later with the black man, and also in Antoinette's relations with Rochester. All these pairings, as well as the encounter of Rochester with Amélie, are characterized by inequality of power, economic bondage, and hints of sadistic and masochistic pleasure. Even Rochester himself feels that he was sold by his father into bondage—that of a marriage for money—although it is Antoinette who ends up confined and penniless. The relation of master to slave, with its knot of race and sex, desire and hatred, power and dependence, excitement and shame, is a kind of shadowy template behind every sexual relationship in the novel. It is perhaps involved even in the tormented love of Antoinette for her mother.

The submissiveness of the slave, however, turns eventually to rage and rebellion. As the blacks burned Coulibri, so Antoinette, at the end of the novel, burns Thornfield Hall, fulfilling the destiny created for her in *Jane Eyre*. In Rhys's version, the act takes place in a dream of the past: as Antoinette leaps from the ramparts she calls Tia's name, in a final attempt to rejoin the lost black self of childhood.

The issue of race in *Wide Sargasso Sea* goes beyond history and politics to the unconscious, where racial feelings have their deepest roots. The novel's most memorable images—the garden of Coulibri, the fire and Tia throwing the stone, the red-haired boy and the bad-smelling girl, the mother in the arms of the black man—are dreamlike in their haunting power, and like dreams they represent the conflicts of the unconscious. In its fidelity to the unresolved nature of those conflicts, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has a kind of painful, masochistic integrity. It is disturbingly honest in its exploration of the fantasies and the tangled, contradictory desires not only of a Creole society, but of the Western imagination itself in its continuing struggle with the dilemma of race. Its political sympathies—whether with the oppressed black majority or the dispossessed white minority—are finally as profoundly ambiguous as the unconscious conflicts in which they are rooted.

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Visitors to last season's "hot shows," the Whitney Biennial and the P.S.1 extravaganza, might have been forgiven for concluding that if painting isn't dead, it's not at all well—at least as far as a younger generation is concerned. Of course, if you still subscribe to those discredited criteria, excellence and vitality, you might have thought that "nontraditional" media weren't particularly healthy, either. I'd even be worried about the state of film, if it hadn't been for Shirin Neshat's haunting, exotic dramas, in both exhibitions, with their overwhelming images and mysterious, implied narratives. Neshat's stagey, absorbing piece at the Whitney, about men and chador-clad women, separated by a curtain as they listen to a loud, abrasive recounting of a tale of adultery, rang changes on the tradition of orientalism, Iran's troubled history, perceptions of Islam, French film noir, documentaries, and ritual itself, with powerful results.

Part of the vigor of Neshat's work comes not only from her ability to tell a story obliquely and lucidly, but also from her celebration of her medium's possibilities. She both exploits and tweaks our associations with the moving image, exploring a zone between fact and fiction that makes us reexamine our assumptions. Few of the fairly dismal roster of paintings at the Whitney displayed any such enthusiasm for materials; most looked as if their authors actually disliked paint or, at least, had no faith in the tradition of painting. A row of Richard Tuttle's improbable geometric figures on plywood were exceptions because of their whole-hearted exploration of visual possibilities (although I preferred the more spatially complex works he exhibited at Sperone Westwater this fall). Even more exceptional were Joseph Marioni's seductive monochromes, with their subtle surfaces and their contradictory sense of presentness and elusiveness. The Biennial's curators should be congratulated for including this marvelous painter's work—he is not widely enough known in the U.S.—but whoever was responsible for a frankly hostile installation should be fired as a saboteur. Placing Marioni's paintings at right angles to one of the museum's rare windows, on the outside wall of Neshat's video theater, guaranteed that strong west

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light flattened their delicate surface inflections, while a booming, brutal soundtrack subverted any effort to concentrate on these slow, contemplative works.

Elsewhere last season, painting seemed remarkably healthy. At the New York Studio School's Eighth Street gallery, *Painting Abstraction* brought together an impressive number of ambitious works by artists ranging from well-known to "emerging." Some were more accomplished than others, but all in all, the show affirmed that (*pace* the Whitney), faith in invention, intuition, and the material of paint, plus, it goes without saying, intelligence, experience, and sheer native ability, can still produce images that reward attention—without resorting to mimicry, irony, or allusion to an agenda. Among the most memorable works in the show: Louise Fishman's urgently stroked, layered web, Melissa Meyer's radiant, exuberantly scribbled "landscape-grid," Jill Nathanson's zingy split-screen take on urban experience, Caio Fonseca's quiet visualization of musical harmonies, Stephen Westfall's deceptively austere examination of warped geometry, Thomas Nozkowski's otherworldly collision of textures, transparencies, and floating shapes.

In Chelsea, before and after *Painting Abstraction*, Nozkowski's solo show at Max Protech and Fonseca's at Paul Kasmin offered opportunities to see these artists' current work in some depth. I've been a fan of Nozkowski's enigmatic little pictures for years, captivated by his ability to stage powerful tragedies and comedies, as enacted by odd, unnameable shapes and strange zones of color. His recent pictures are among his best, as puzzling and engaging as ever, but enriched by even greater physical nuance, an even larger range of paint surfaces and marks that reinforces the conversation among shapes, colors, and forms. The show included some relatively large pictures for Nozkowski, who for years has been faithful to an intimate format about the size of a sheet of watercolor paper, and scaling up seems to suit him; it gives his pictures more air.

Nozkowski says that his unidentifiable images are rooted in some real experience or sensation—visual or otherwise—recognizable to him, if not to his viewers. Explicit or not, the intensity of that initial impulse haunts his paintings, making them both compelling and hard to come to terms with, like barely remembered, rapidly receding, but nonetheless powerful dream images. Nozkowski's new pictures are eerie, wry, intelligent, witty, and often very beautiful.

Fonseca's exhibition of recent paintings also included some of his largest, most ambitious works to date and for him, as for Nozkowski, bigger was often better. Working large allows—or forces—Fonseca to

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simplify and scale up the oddball, arching shapes he "carves" out of his layered expanses, so that "figure" seems interchangeable with "ground." The result is a beneficial heightening of spatial ambiguity, further intensified by a flurry of small elements, sparsely but tellingly placed, like ornaments in a Baroque keyboard composition.

The musical analogy is apt, since Fonseca, an accomplished pianist, seems to think of putting his pictures together the way a composer well-schooled in counterpoint might think of writing a concerto. He prefers to work within a disciplined, predetermined structure, testing his ability to improvise against a hard-won understanding of visual harmony. Fonseca is alert to the peculiar demands a picture imposes on its maker as it evolves, so that if all goes as he hopes, the tension between self-imposed limits and informed intuition provokes the unexpected. There's always a risk of things being a little *too* resolved, even a little *too* elegant, but when Fonseca is at his best, the struggle between the given and the unpremeditated produces unpredictable, satisfying, unsettling images. Witness the star of the recent show: a big, deceptively simple purple-black picture, at once sleek, powerful, and a little undisciplined, like some enormous, not entirely domesticated beast. I look forward to seeing more of this side of this gifted, highly instinctual painter.

At Kim Foster, paintings by Carlos Leon were paired with sculptures by Stan Smokler, reminding us that they were two of the strongest artists in the Chelsea gallery's 1999 group show, *Small Abstractions*. Smokler's steel constructions were, as always, elegant and thoughtful. The best are animated by a playful quality that is somewhat at odds with this master metalworker's highly refined methods and virtuoso technique. That conflict is, I suppose, part of what Smokler's work is about, but since he can do just about anything he desires with steel, I wish he'd let loose a little more, or at least resist finishing his work so much—that is to say, trust his impulses more. Who knows what might happen?

Leon showed a group of brooding black-and-white paintings that seemed to blur deliberately the boundaries between the willed and the phenomenal. Sometimes they looked like meticulously painted abstracted landscapes, sometimes like weird, photo-based extrapolations on imaginary places. I liked best the most ambiguous picture in the show, a large canvas, all oxide red and dull ochre-browns, in which Leon's insistent touch was more visible than in the black-and-white pictures. Rhythmic strokes and slashes of paint seemed to spread across the canvas as we watched, coalescing to form an unforgettable image, somewhere between a virtuoso flourish and an enormous foot. It was a strange and rather marvelous picture that I hope has many fellows.

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"Strange" and "rather marvelous" were apt descriptions, also, of Robert Taplin's roomful of new sculptures at Trans-Hudson Gallery in the Meat Market District. He also showed a few earlier works, large surrealizing/sci-fi bronzes of odd beings engaged in not quite comprehensible activities, presented with an engaging mixture of skill and deliberate artlessness. Impressive as the earlier pieces were, I found Taplin's new works to be subtler and more mysterious. In them, instead of more or less naturalistic storytelling groups—however oblique the tale they suggested—we were offered pairs of rather plump, rather ordinary male figures whose drama resided in their materials, their placement, and their apparent lack of style. One of each pair was made of translucent rice paper, illuminated from within; its mate was opaque. The pairs were suspended in a darkened space, lit only by the sculptures themselves—"the five outer planets," Taplin calls them, reminding us that Saturn devoured his young—so that the opaque images depended on their faintly glowing counterparts to be seen at all.

The naturalism of the little figures was deceptive; in fact, Taplin rings changes on both classicism and realism, setting up and defeating expectations, disrupting our most carefully formulated ideas about the ideal and the particular, about repetition and mirroring, naturalism and abstraction, and calling up a host of (sometimes contradictory) associations. For all their apparent modesty, his recent sculptures are fiercely intelligent and demanding.

The survey of Fairfield Porter's paintings, "A Life in Art," organized by his biographer, Justin Spring, on view at New York's AXA Gallery (the former Equitable Gallery), posed similar questions about the roles of perception and preconception, observation and invention. The show was a nice mix of familiar and less familiar pictures, bracketed by fascinating documentary material—photographs, letters, and one of Rudy Burkhardt's more puckish efforts: a parody of a silent film in which Porter and his wife perform, along with reminders of the painter's trenchant art criticism.

Porter is our homegrown, East Coast Vermeer, a connoisseur of the ephemeral, the domestic, the apparently insignificant. He painted things you can't imagine anyone wanting to paint—images you'd discard if they turned up in a batch of snapshots: parked cars, screen doors, nondescript rooms seen from odd angles. He celebrated a Waspy Arcadia, a place of genteel, slightly down-at-the-heels comfort, of backyards and porches, where nothing much happens, unless you count, as he plainly did, the way afternoon light suffuses a living room in summer. Emotion is expressed with restraint in this low-key earthly

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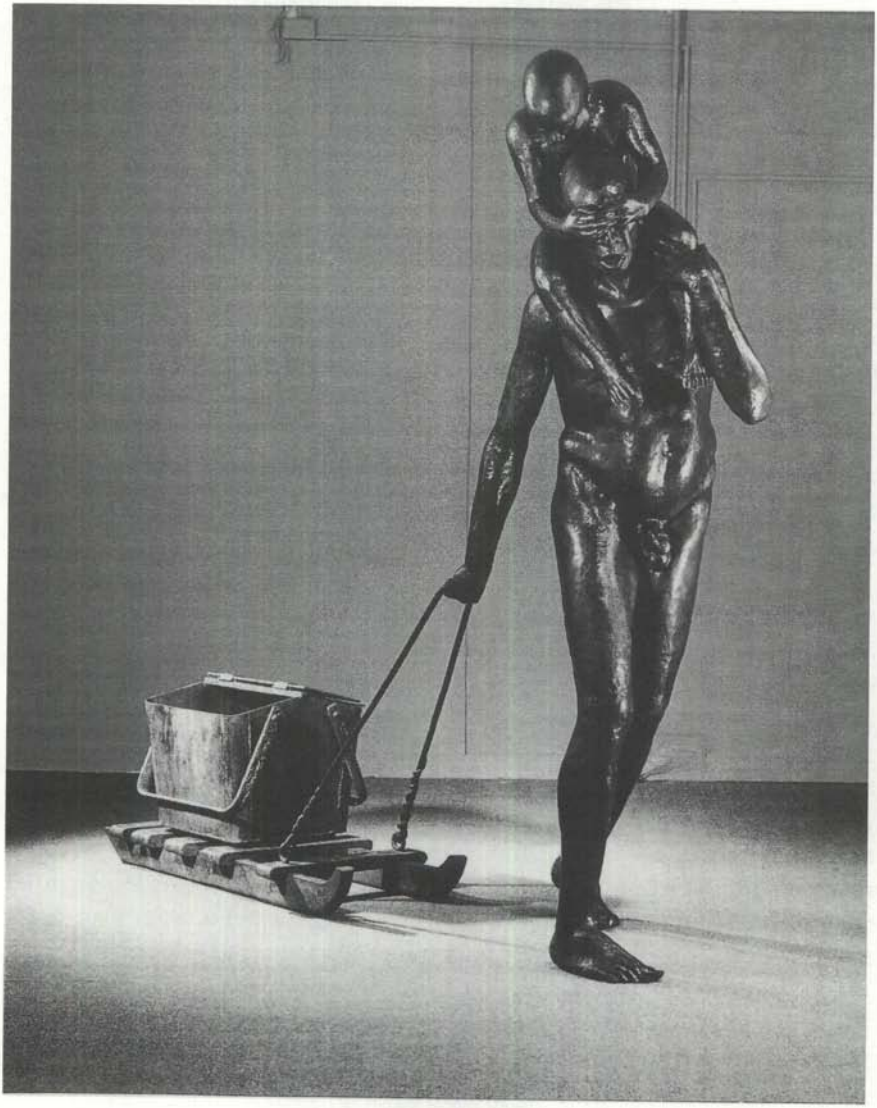

Walk Like a Man (Heavy Sledding) (1989) by Robert Taplin. Forged steel. 84 by 96 by 36 inches. Courtesy of Trans-Hudson Gallery.

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paradise. Porter's portraits are affectionate, but never sentimental or flattering. He turned the same dispassionate eye on his friends and family as he did on a view of a parking lot or a breakfast table.

Porter's approach belongs to a long American tradition of fascination with things as they are that cuts across disciplines—think Thomas Eakins or John Updike or Wallace Stevens. What's surprising is not that Porter was a stubborn realist, but that he was a stubborn realist whose friends, contemporaries, and neighbors were Abstract Expressionists. Yet, though he believed that a painting was a disciplined translation of perceptions, not a metaphor for inchoate emotions, it's clear that he was neither immune to the seduction of juicy Ab-Ex paint handling nor indifferent to the demands of the literal flat surface of the canvas. The struggle between these apparently contradictory impulses is part of what makes Porter's work exciting. You are convinced of the truth of his observations at the same time that you are fully aware of the artifice of how he paints his pictures. When Porter's pictures don't come off, they can seem stiff, careful, and—well, *ordinary*. The underlying harmony of the everyday remains hidden and his heightened color can seem arbitrary or sour. But his best pictures seem effortless, inevitable, and absolutely true. And wonderfully painted.

The Arthur B. Carles retrospective at Hollis-Taggart Galleries uptown was the first major show of this seldom-seen painter's work in about fifteen years. (Accompanied by an informative, copiously illustrated catalogue, the exhibition was also seen at the Woodmere Art Museum, in Pennsylvania, from April through June.) Carles is something of an enigma, a pioneer, significant to the evolution of modernism in this country, who has never received quite as much attention as his early membership in the vanguard should merit—which is not to say that his pictures are not in important public and private collections or that he doesn't figure in histories of the American avant-garde. Reputed to have been an engaging talker and inspiring teacher, Carles also left a body of lively, opinionated writings, generously quoted in the catalogue. His relative obscurity is partly due to his having spent most of his life in Philadelphia, apart from sojourns in Europe and occasional visits to New York, partly, it seems, to his lack of interest in self-promotion. (He was, however, represented by Stieglitz for a time.)

Carles absorbed the lessons of the European avant-garde firsthand during the years he spent in France, off and on between 1905 and 1912—in time to see the great Cézanne retrospective of 1907, as well as some of the Fauvists' important showings. The young painter visited the Steins and met many of the most forward-looking artists in Paris at the

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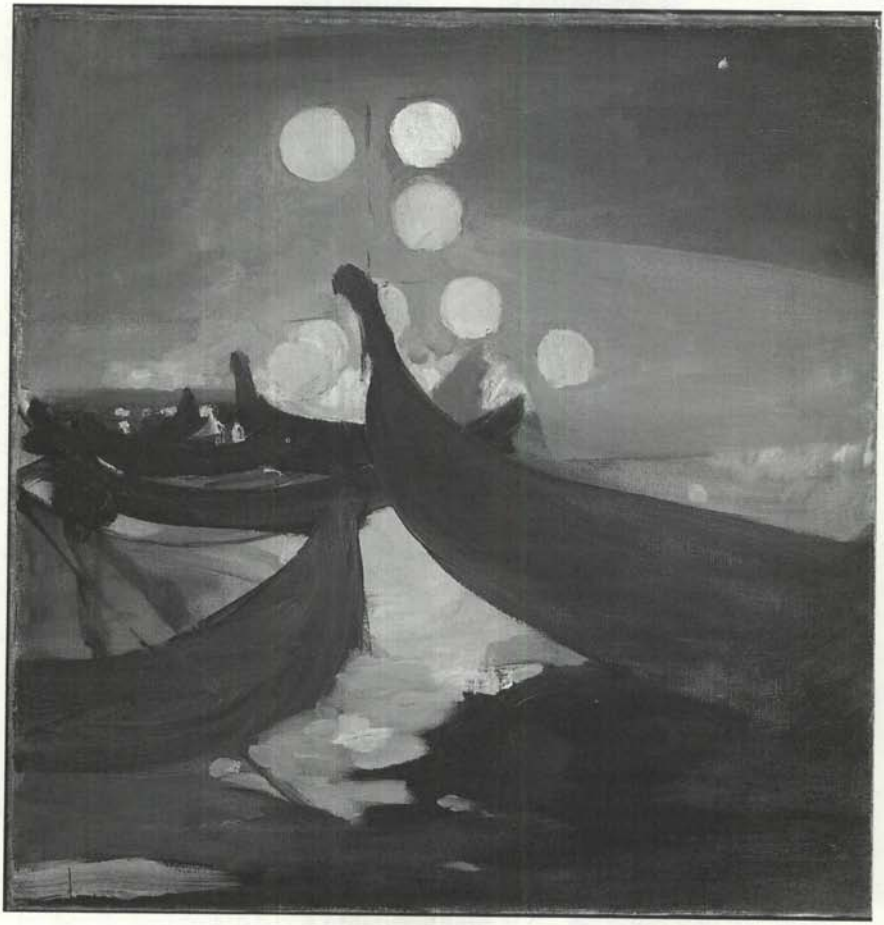

Venetian Gondolas (c. 1909) by Arthur B. Carles. Oil on canvas. 25 by 24 inches. Courtesy of Hollis-Taggart Galleries.

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time, including Hans Hofmann, becoming especially close to Edward Steichen. (Carles later renewed his acquaintance with Hofmann through his daughter, Mercedes, a Hofmann student.) At Hollis-Taggart, Carles's landscapes, still lifes, and the occasional figure painting from these early years bore witness to a struggle between the progressive naturalism the young painter had absorbed at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and his newfound excitement about the brilliance of Fauvist color and the expressive simplifications of Fauvist structure. Among the best of the early pictures were the fresh, direct, boldly stroked landscapes of about 1912, with their economically deployed shapes and resonant hues. Landscape and still life seemed to allow Carles to give full play to his acute color sense; in his figures, for the most part, he remained far more respectful of his realist roots, especially after his return to Philadelphia.

Back in the U.S., Carles remained in contact with European avant-garde art, helping to bring exhibitions of adventurous painting to Philadelphia and maintaining a close friendship with the eccentric collector of modernist art, Earl Horter, who acquired Carles's work along with Matisse's, some splendid Cubist pictures by Picasso, Braque, and Gris, and, perhaps guided by Carles, sculptures by Brancusi. Carles was able to return to France in the 1920s and early 1930s, once again with dramatic effects on his work; his pictures of this period are notable for their renewed freshness, energy, and directness, their inventive shapes, and their brilliance of color—except when he tackled the figure.

The show's organizers and contributors to the handsome catalogue maintain that Carles's late works anticipate Abstract Expressionism with their layers of structural color and their prismatic, Cubist-inspired, sliced forms. Maybe. A few (apparently anomalous) paintings of the mid-1930s seem rather Gorky-ish, probably because they refer to sources that Gorky, too, admired, but most of Carles's late work seems crabbed, overworked, and too-aggressively subdivided, devoid of the breadth and generosity of his smaller, more direct French paintings or their immediate successors. Even Carles's color seems a little overblown in many of these pictures; he simply couldn't resist going around the entire spectrum in every picture. The result of isolation and bitterness? Of the difficulties of working large? A single, alas, atypical canvas offered a tantalizing glimpse of what the mature Carles was capable of at his absolute best: the large, loose *White Abstraction* (c. 1935, Metropolitan Museum), with its vigorous strokes, confident drawing, and luminous, subtle palette. This first-rate, spontaneous picture suggested that underneath some of those tight, dry-late paintings lurked images as

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audacious and exciting as this. Unfortunately, we'll never know how or if Carles might have developed the implications of this provocative picture. He suffered a devastating stroke at the age of fifty-nine, tragically living on for more than ten years, unable to paint, teach, or write.

Hollis-Taggart is to be thanked for showing us Carles whole, but they deserve loud boos for infelicitous installation. Their "house style" involves crowding as many works as possible throughout several floors of multi-function rooms, most of them embellished with loaded desks, computers, and other office detritus. Fewer works, more sympathetically installed, would serve both the art and gallery visitors more effectively.

The exhibition of John Heliker's drawings at Kraushaar, planned as a celebration of his fifty-five years with the gallery, became instead a memorial when Heliker died this spring at the age of ninety-one. The show gave an overwhelming impression of astonishing intimacy, not just because the subjects of the drawings, in pencil or charcoal, were Heliker's friends, the interiors of familiar rooms, and the Maine landscape where the painter spent summers for more than four decades, but because the works themselves were so subtle, delicate, and private. Studying a roomful of these quiet, but powerful images was like watching someone think.

Heliker's nervous, searching marks are like tentative responses to rapid observations, stuttering pauses that bear witness to restless looking, at the same time that they are utterly assured, economical equivalents for feeling and seeing, the result of a lifetime's effort to make the intangible and the ephemeral visible. Heliker's sitters seem completely recognizable as individuals, yet the strokes that call them up seem about to dissolve into an indeterminate web; weightless, fragile bits of tone conjure up the rocky shores of Cranberry Isle. If this sounds precious or tricky, think again. Heliker's drawings (and watercolors) are straightforward, rigorous efforts to turn the randomness of ordinary experience into ordered, rational imagery. That they remain unstable and slow to yield up their full complexity is an indication of how well Heliker succeeded. His art is about multiple possibilities, not about rigid certainties.

The man himself was, in some ways, full of similar contradictions, at once shy and self-effacing but gregarious, self-deprecating but dazzlingly sure about aesthetic issues. But there was nothing ambiguous about his effect on people—as an inspiring teacher and a generous friend, and, of course, as a maker of ravishing drawings.

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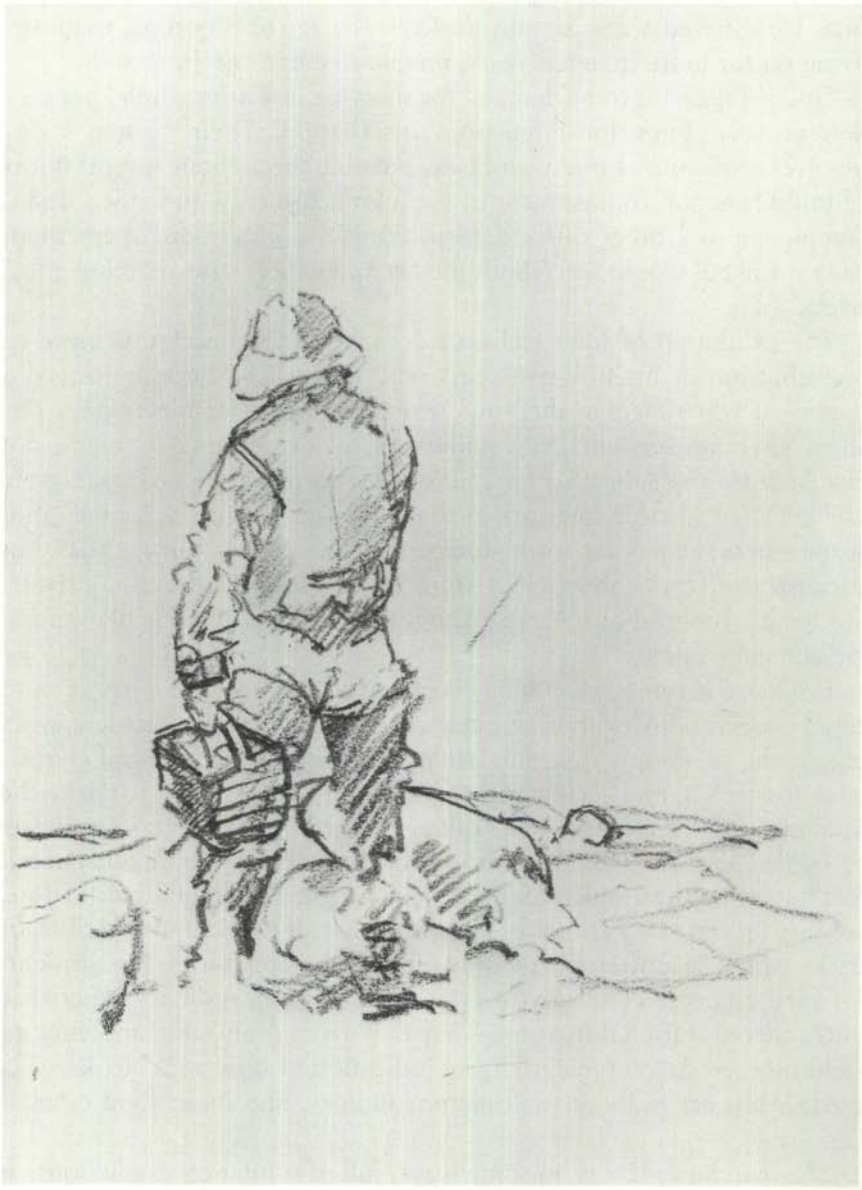

Clam Digger (c. 1990) by John Heliker. Graphite on paper. 12 by 9 inches. Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries, Inc.

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Among the other pleasures to be had this spring was a pair of shows at Ameringer Howard on Fifty-seventh Street which, since its inception, has provided a nonstop sequence of fine work, mostly from the '60s and '70s, by such artists as Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Friedel Dzubas. The past season's offerings included early painted steel pieces by Anthony Caro, low-lying constructions that seemed to defy gravity, skimming along the ground or springing effortlessly away from it. With their clear polychromy, crisp edges, and light, open forms, these "classic" Caros—sculptures that initially established his reputation—looked as fresh and unexpected as they did when they were first shown.

The Hans Hofmann show that followed was equally surprising, since it included vigorous Provincetown paintings—rarely (if ever) exhibited before. Good as these canvases were, with their robust, jostling planes of saturated, brilliant color and richly inflected surfaces, the show was stolen by a wall of rapid, razzle-dazzle crayon drawings, mostly from the 1940s—Hofmann's response to the clear, shifting light of Provincetown and the scrubby landscape of the Cape. The youthful energy and vitality of these explosive little images was so palpable that it was hard to remember that Hofmann was over sixty when he made them.

Two interesting lessons in the effect of context were provided by widely different shows on opposite sides of the continent: paintings by David Stern, a German-born painter resident in New York for about a decade, at Louis Stern Gallery (no relation) in Los Angeles, and sculpture by David Smith on the Metropolitan Museum's roof garden. Stern's recent works evoke New York's crowded sidewalks. He packs fairly narrow vertical canvases with jostling figures, conjured up by disjunctive slabs of paint. The images are at once loose, unstable, and utterly convincing; viewpoints seem to shift, spaces open and close, and in some, a cold blue distance, like a New York winter sky, seems both to open up the pictures and project the figures forward. Stern walks a tightrope between allusion and sheer enthusiasm for paint, turning, in his strongest works, the apparently temporary association of bold, brutal painting marks into a metaphor for the flux of urban experience. (By contrast, Stern's larger-than-life portrait and self-portrait heads, whether painted or drawn, are relentlessly frontal and confrontational, with the entire surface of the canvas or sheet of paper made into an equivalent for the plane of the face.)

When Stern showed his recent streetscapes at his New York gallery Rosenberg and Kaufman, they resonated with the energy of the city itself, as though New York's culture of pedestrians gave the paintings a

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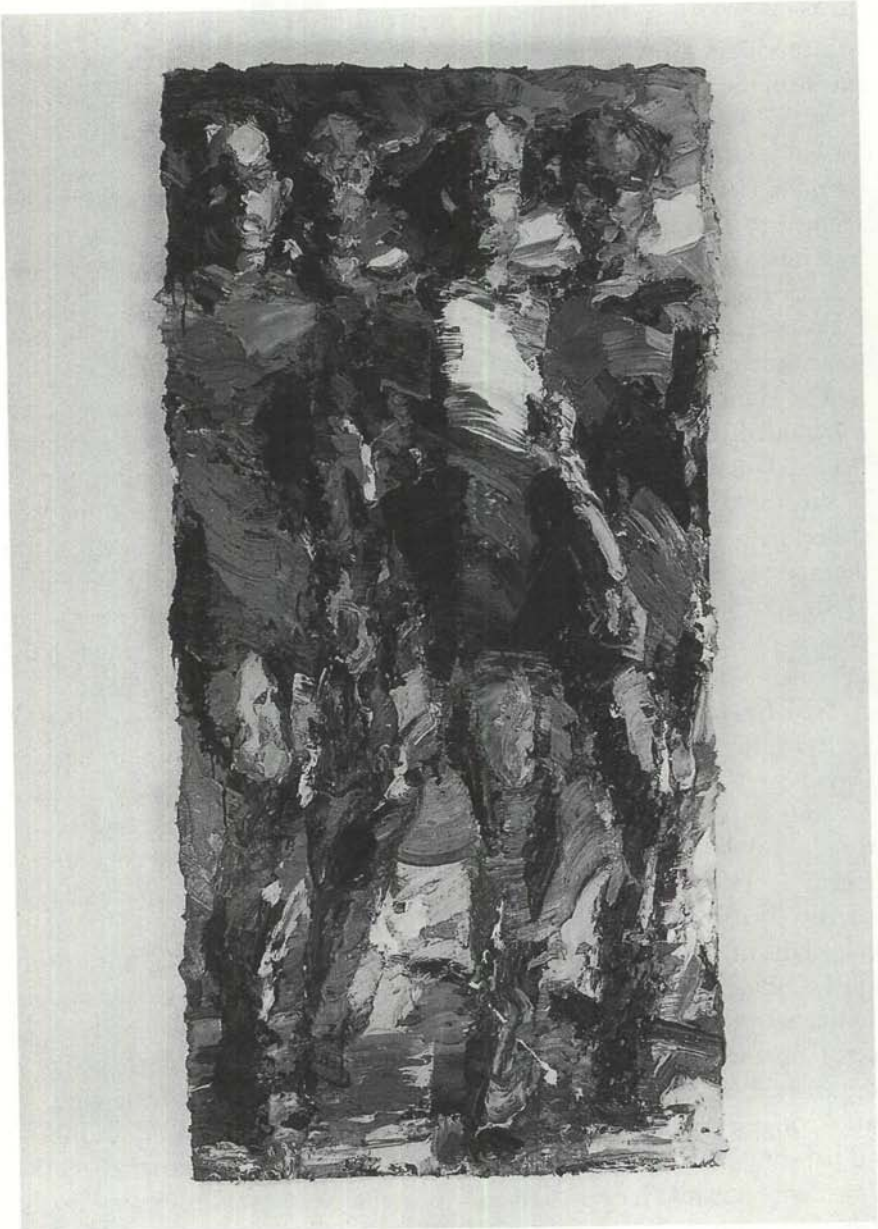

Closing Time Glow (1999) by David Stern. Oil on canvas. 75 by 36 inches. Courtesy of Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art.

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special context. In Los Angeles, in a street-level gallery on Melrose, Stern's pictures seemed no less robust, no less authoritative as *paintings*, but somehow more aestheticized, less rough-hewn. Your awareness of California's omnipresent car culture made Stern's shifting crowds seem newly vulnerable, like an endangered species, while his layered painting gestures seemed more transient than ever, suggesting a new reading of these works as about a transplanted European's perceptions of modern American city life.

The Met's roof garden, with its spectacular views of the New York skyline, is a challenging site for any sculpture. The marvelous group of stainless steel Smiths in this summer's show, intelligently chosen to demonstrate both his single-mindedness and his wide-ranging inventiveness, his acute sense of the human presence and his ability to create unprecedented structures, stood up brilliantly to this difficult background. Except for the expanse of sky, this quintessentially urban setting couldn't be more different from the fields and distant green Adirondack slopes against which Smith first studied these sculptures, delighting in the way the burnished stainless steel reflected light and color. Yet the buildings surrounding Central Park entered into a new and invigorating conversation with the sculptures, one based not on the contrast between the man-made and the natural, but on the likeness and unlikeness of different kinds of man-made constructions—differences of function, scale, mass, and articulation. This provocative dialogue was a stimulating bonus to the pleasure of seeing a group of fine works by one of the giants of twentieth-century sculpture. Not that spending time with wonderful art in a dramatic setting needs justification.

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MORRIS DICKSTEIN

Going to the Movies: As Good as It Gets

WITHOUT PRODUCING any real masterpieces, 1999 was not only the best moviegoing year of the decade, but offered perhaps the most impressive array of new films since the 1970s. How did this happen? How did so many first-rate movies steal in upon us? Some of our shrewdest critics—David Denby in the *New Yorker*, Godfrey Cheshire in the *New York Press*, Susan Sontag in the *Times Magazine*—have argued that the movie culture as we knew it is a thing of the past, done in by the new digital technology, the pressures of the bottom line, the decline of the individual auteur, the leveling effect of the American movies in the international market, and the breakdown of other national cinemas. But in the last few years, even as knowledge of film history has all but evaporated, movies have come to rival sports as a universal point of reference, serving even as a lingua franca for the educated class. Many things *have* declined, including the old reverence for cinema as art, along with some bedrock standards of Hollywood moviemaking. Yet somehow, in the teeth of a crass and gigantic business, a vibrant new film scene has emerged, despite the predictable frustrations of those trying to do serious work.

Nearly all of last year's best movies, including some wonderful films from abroad, proved surprisingly unconventional. The British director Mike Leigh made his reputation with slice-of-life dramas about contemporary life filmed in quasi-documentary style, with scripts worked up through months of improvisation by the actors. Who would have expected him to make *Topsy-Turvy*, a period piece about Gilbert and Sullivan, developed in exactly the same painstaking manner? Neil Jordan's finest work is infused with his passionate feeling for Irish life, yet for *The End of the Affair* he recreated the stoical mood of Britain in the 1940s, adapting one of Graham Greene's religious novels in the spirit of small, moodily romantic films like *Brief Encounter*. David Lynch and Pedro Almodóvar were two of the kinkiest, most intransigent talents to emerge in the 1980s. In *Blue Velvet* and the *Twin Peaks* TV series, Lynch set out to expose the dark secrets of small-town life, the corruption that passes for innocence and normality. Almodóvar,

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despite his more benign temperament, shocked a newly liberated Spain with gay love stories like *Law of Desire* and campy soap operas and comedies such as *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. Both directors have gone through lean periods lately. But in *The Straight Story*, Lynch, losing none of his eerie clarity, focuses on an old man crossing the Midwest on a tractor mower to visit his sick brother, while Almodóvar, in *All About My Mother*, told the story of a grieving mother who goes back to the bohemian world where her dead son was conceived—a world of tender transvestites, squabbling actors, and unhappy lovers. In their different ways, one deceptively understated, the other colorfully exotic, both movies make corny feelings of love and loss meaningful again.

The year offered some beautifully made films by first-time directors, including *American Beauty* by Sam Mendes, best known for his stage work, *Being John Malkovich* by Spike Jonze, a photographer and director of videos, and *Boys Don't Cry* by Kimberly Peirce, based on the story of a young woman in the Midwest who was raped and killed after posing as a man. Other impressive work by young directors who emerged out of the independent film scene included a well-written, vivacious comedy, *Election*, by Alexander Payne; *Magnolia*, by Paul Thomas Anderson, an overly ambitious, Altmanesque round-robin of stories about fathers and children, misery and regret; and *Girl, Interrupted*, directed by James Mangold, a very effective adaptation of Susanna Kaysen's memoir of her year in a mental institution.

There were powerful but imperfect films by veteran directors, among them Martin Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* (the dark night of the soul, as seen through the eyes of an emergency medical technician, played by Nicholas Cage in the vein of *Leaving Las Vegas*); Michael Mann's *The Insider* (about the travail of a whistle blower from the tobacco industry); Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown* (with Sean Penn as a self-destructive jazz genius); and hard-boiled, noirish dramas by Canadian director Atom Egoyan (*Felicia's Journey*), Steven Soderbergh (*The Limey*), and Anthony Minghella (*The Talented Mr. Ripley*).

It would be redundant for me to describe all these films in detail, but taken together and separately they help us make sense of some key features of the new film scene. The old split between the commercial (Hollywood) movie and the (European) art film has broken down completely. Certainly there are still movies that are so relentlessly bleak and claustral that they seem like caricatures of old-style art films. Two examples were Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's almost unbearable *Rosetta* and Mike Figgis's misconceived version of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Both were filmed with handheld cameras in tight close-ups that

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imprisoned the spectator along with the characters, dispensing with the whole social framework of their lives. These were suffocating one-note stories intent on rubbing our noses in human misery. At the other extreme, there were more than enough knuckleheaded comedies, action movies, and soporific melodramas. But it is no longer true, as it was until a few years ago, that Hollywood is making movies only for kids and retarded teenagers. Once again there is a fertile middle ground of stories that are appealing and accessible yet far from predictable.

Unlike mainstream movies of the past, these films belong to no ready genre. Or else they turn a genre inside out, as Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy* deconstructs the standard biopic by injecting a strong dose of emotional reality. Yet they are not self-conscious about moviemaking (in the New Wave manner) or ironic about it (in the tongue-in-cheek style of the minimalists of the 1980s). Above all, these films could be more downbeat, more honest, and more elliptical than most commercial movies of the recent past. In musical biographies, especially period pieces, the backstage drama is little more than fluff or filler to showcase the actual performances. The players seem as much in costume in their own lives as they are on the stage. *Topsy-Turvy*, on the other hand, deals with personality clashes and deep insecurities that are also creative tensions, problems in making art. These relationships reflect the stresses in any performing group, including the troupe of Mike Leigh regulars making the movie. Leigh is much more interested in the rehearsal scenes than in the finished work, for he wants to show how individual quirks are disciplined into seamless performance.

Combining brutal sarcasm with perfect British decorum, Gilbert browbeats the players into realizing his vision, as Sullivan cajoles his musicians with ironic deference. The behind-the-scenes drama of this collective effort is something every theatre professional will recognize. Leigh has chosen to explore his own creative life by taking an unlikely route through the Victorian era. Nothing could be more typically Victorian than the G & S operettas, yet (in sometimes fusty versions) they continue to have wide currency. In *Topsy-Turvy* the moment is 1885, on the cusp of the modern, with novelties like telephones and fountain pens, yet still at the zenith of Victorian power and manners. Gilbert himself, as played by Jim Broadbent, radiates indelible self-assurance, even when his restive partner berates his work. But his stentorian voice, frigid impatience with his neglected wife, and imperious courtesy towards colleagues and actors are the kind of bluster that masks inner uncertainties. Sullivan's feline charm and gregarious, pleasure-loving manner cover a steely will. Their temperamental differences are

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essential to what they achieved—a medley of barbed wit and tender feeling that neither could have managed on his own.

Apart from their muted radical politics, Leigh's films emerge from a post-sixties aesthetic that challenges the actor not only to find authentic emotions but to write the lines that will express them. Without the dominant hand of a playwright, these stories depend on individual scenes, sometimes involving characters who never reappear, such as Gilbert's mad father and embittered mother, or matters hardly mentioned again—the death of General Gordon in Khartoum, the alcohol abuse of one actor, the drug addiction of another. The rare closeups have the same highlighting effect. A tiny smile lights up Gilbert's features as the idea for *The Mikado* leaps to mind, just as a pensive grimace flickers across his face as he takes in his father's dementia or his wife's sexual unhappiness. In a world in which formal manners dictate enormous restraint, in which the camera itself usually keeps a respectful distance, such discrete scenes and intimate moments humanize the characters by pointing up all that remains unspoken, the feelings only obliquely expressed.

Leigh is a particularly subtle and patient director with a quiet passion for emotional authenticity. He shows how fragile and exposed actors can be, and how much support they give each other. This is exactly what interests Almodóvar about his community of women, which is also his company of actors, in *All About My Mother*. Like many gay men, indeed, like many artists and others who grew up feeling out of step, Almodóvar is fascinated by role-playing. His story is a twin tribute to actresses who play actresses and to men who impersonate women. Like Leigh's movie it is about performance—how actors perform their own lives and how they bring life to the stage. But where Leigh strives for freshness in a period piece, Almodóvar echoes and imitates the old stories that inspired him, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *All About Eve*, a Romy Schneider film, and John Cassavetes's little-known movie about performers, *Opening Night*. All these have great women's roles, and in the intuitive relationships of his four main actresses, Almodóvar offers homage to Blanche and Stella, to Schneider and to Gena Rowlands. Rarely has a film so derivative seemed so deeply felt. The unlikely way these plucky women come through for each other—the bereaved mother, the aging diva, the pregnant nun, the hard-edged transvestite—lends humor and vitality to soap opera material.

If two veteran directors from Britain and Spain delivered some of their best work last year, what has this to do with the new American film scene? Well, *nothing* and everything. Leigh and Almodóvar seek emotional honesty in movies for grown-up audiences but, unlike the

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dwindling ranks of Godardian avant-garde, they are not uncompromising formalists obsessed with film as film, although they too are probing the conditions of representation. They tackle serious subjects within accessible narratives; they give us permission to suspend disbelief, to identify with the characters. The closest parallel to the way they work can be found in today's independent cinema and the studio movies that spring from it. The triumph of Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* at both Cannes and the Sundance Festival in 1989 signaled the beginning of the end for the juvenile moviemaking of the 1980s. As the outlets for film expanded in multiplexes, on video, and on cable channels, as well-trained kids with outsized ambitions poured out of film schools and new sources of funding proliferated beyond the studio system, filmmakers rediscovered a neglected audience for knotty, intelligent drama. (Critic Emanuel Levy has just done an indispensable survey of this scene in *The Cinema of Outsiders*.) There would always be plenty of adolescent male fantasy, Tarantino-style, in indie cinema, plenty of rough-hewn improvisation that makes us long for Hollywood production values. But today's movies would be unimaginable without the offbeat modes of personal storytelling reinvented by these films.

Take *Boys Don't Cry*, Kimberly Peirce's delicate film about a cross-dressing young woman named Teena Brandon who insists, with her innocent Midwestern charm, that she's not gay but, inwardly, a man attracted to women, a man comfortable doing men's work, comfortable in a bar with other men. She not only feels like a man but longs for the freedom only men can exercise. In the classic American way, gawky but unembarrassed, she takes on a new identity by reversing her names and drifting to another town. When her secret is discovered, there are men who feel threatened by her, and the movie quickly turns from an adolescent lark into a violent tale straight out of the flat landscape of *The Executioner's Song*.

Ironically, her girlfriend remains loyal; confused as she is by her lover's gender-bending, she still wants to run off with her. Based on a documentary film about the same case, *Boys Don't Cry* is a one-of-a-kind story, not the least bit lurid or exploitative despite its tabloid potential. It is told with great emotional tact and kept afloat by two pitch-perfect performances by Hilary Swank and Chloë Sevigny. In much the same way, Winona Ryder (as Susanna Kaysen) and Angelina Jolie (as her demonic, truth-telling friend) steer clear of the clichés of mental illness in Mangold's sensitive *Girl, Interrupted*. These are not uplifting movies with facile resolutions for serious problems; they are risk-taking projects, not for the faint of heart.

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Two of the year's best examples of such idiosyncratic storytelling could be found in the seemingly conventional tale of suburban angst, *American Beauty*, and, at the other extreme, in *Being John Malkovich*, a loopy fantasy about spending time inside one actor's head. Both are black comedies that begin with boring, unhappy marriages, but where Kevin Spacey in *American Beauty* imagines he can shake up his life by dumping his job, pumping iron, and having an affair with his teenage daughter's best friend, John Cusack, the ponytailed puppeteer in *Being John Malkovich*, takes an ordinary job only to find himself in a creepy world out of pop Kafka and *Alice in Wonderland*.

What matters in these movies is less the story itself than how it's told. Built around a restless middle-aged male, his uptight wife, and their surly adolescent daughter, *American Beauty* could have been a routine dissection of middle America, of the kind familiar from the hateful, sanctimonious films of Neil LaBute (*Your Friends & Neighbors*) and Todd Solondz (*Happiness*). But Kevin Spacey tells his story from beyond the grave, like William Holden in *Sunset Boulevard*, and the warm, rueful tone of his recollections, combined with the eerily beautiful *look* of the film, prepares us for a redemptive, almost transcendent turn. By the end, characters who seemed barely two-dimensional are touched with grace, mystery, even sublimity, in ways that can hardly be explained. Unexpectedly, Spacey's banal life and absurd death take on genuine meaning. There are similar touches of transcendence in *The Straight Story*, as if David Lynch, leaving irony behind, had decided to find a modest heroism in one man's stubborn determination—in an ordinary life played out in an ordinary setting.

If *American Beauty* casts a preternatural glow on what otherwise might have been uneventful lives, *Being John Malkovich*, with its ingenious script by Charley Kaufman, sets out to make the fantastic seem altogether routine. Where other movies about performance focus on actors getting inside their characters, this one shows us routine characters spicing up their lives by getting inside an actor. Why John Malkovich? Once a far more versatile performer, Malkovich has found a niche for himself in creepy, reptilian roles. Since getting into his head would seem like no one's dream destination, the movie becomes a sendup of celebrity: the Malkovich trip proves to be a marketable commodity, and soon everyone queues up. But after Andy Warhol's proverbial fifteen minutes of fame, they're dumped beside the New Jersey Turnpike, which is down to earth with a vengeance.

Once inside John Malkovich, you get to make love to someone who wouldn't otherwise give you the time of day, or take over his body like

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a dybbuk, perhaps even to alter his whole life. Or sometimes you get to do nothing at all—celebrity can be that boring—yet the chance of getting inside someone else's skin appears irresistible. In short, going through this looking glass becomes an inverted form of voyeurism, a metaphor for shedding your skin and seeing the world through someone else's eyes—except, in a perfectly surreal scene, when Malkovich himself tries it. *Being John Malkovich* is more of a lark than a piece of reflexive cinema: this fantastic voyage that isn't about anything so much as the exuberance with which it was made. It conjures up a hideous conceit and, with the amused participation of Malkovich himself, plays wonderful and surprising changes on it.

Being John Malkovich was one of several of the year's exceptional films first exhibited at the New York Film Festival, still a bastion of the avant-garde but now also the home of this new mainstream filmmaking. *All About My Mother*, *Felicia's Journey*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Topsy-Turvy* were also featured, but so were *Rosetta*, Jane Campion's *Holy Smoke*, Kevin Smith's sophomoric *Dogma*, and two daringly original French adaptations of Melville, Claire Denis's spare, arid *Beau Travail* (very loosely based on *Billy Budd*) and Leos Carax's giddily romantic *Pola X* (an exhilarating version of *Pierre*). Once distributors were loath to permit films with any commercial prospects to be shown at the festival, for fear they would be stigmatized as Art; now it has become the best venue for introducing serious independent films, whatever their origin.

As in contemporary fiction and music, this new middle ground in movies was made possible not simply by the decline of the avant-garde but by its assimilation into the mainstream—with uncommon themes, fresh techniques, and challenging ways of telling a story. Once again filmmakers have learned to make it new, but without feeling the need to dismantle the medium and alienate the audience. This resurgence has not only revived the film culture but made it fun to be a critic again. In recent times this could be a numbing vocation, for it meant being constantly exposed to the standard product, deadly beyond belief. You could almost taste the sour boredom of many regular reviewers. For those who grew up in the sixties and seventies, when every week brought some new provocation, this was painfully disillusioning. Today the major occupational hazard of film critics is being swamped by a flood of new releases in the last weeks of December, opening just in time to qualify for awards. But there are far worse troubles than having too much to see.

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TRACY SALVAGE

Of Pictorial and Symbolic Balance: The Influence of the Cinquecento in Jean Hélion

Jean Hélion was concerned with nothing less than the absolute status of painting itself—not just French painting, but all painting. He expected to transcend the illusion of reality, to reach "to the other side of the mirror" and achieve a cosmic "oneness." In aspiring to such spiritual heights, we may think of him as the symbolic androgyne, or mercury, of art. In alchemy, mercury or quicksilver brings together opposing forces, and turns base matter into perfection. The hermaphroditic figure of the androgyne and its corresponding number, two, represent balance, the ephemeral, and the passage of time. As many belief systems do, Hélion strove to achieve true perfection by reconciling and uniting opposing forces. We think of his stunning *A rebours* (1947), a male and upended female equilibrated sublimely in color and form, yet contrary, and of his love-making mannequins in the panoramic triptych *The Last Judgment of Things* (1979), balanced in a moment of passion, shrouded in enigma, transcending the real.

Throughout Hélion's lifelong quest into the very nature of painting—his early years of abstraction, constructivism, surrealism, realism, etc.—he welcomed contradiction and paradox, and constantly disrupted our assumptions. He did not settle for the status quo of any system or movement. He was a tricky shape-shifter, the very essence of mental transformation in search of "oneness," all the while throwing many off course. Despite his courageous grappling with doubt and despair in his journals, he was always steadfast. Yes, there is that familiar umbrella appearing again and again, often protecting the inhabitants of his paintings from rain, but just as often folded and propped against a doorway, heralding the extreme introspection required to enter another state of consciousness—one where the poet dreams his dream, as in *Grande mannequinerie* (1951).

In the early days of abstraction and constructivism, Hélion's artist-friends such as Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg were also searching for a universal order in art. This dream entailed finding painterly equivalents to music, "raising monuments of space," or creating an environmental

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arrangement of paintings such that "the canvas. . .is a public square in which the image will be built like a monument." And yet Hélion was also conscious of the artist as an intermediary of history, of questions raised in one generation and responded to and transformed by the next. Indeed, he considered all aspects of art history—he looked near and far, and found deep affinities with the Venetians. In the 1950s and 1960s, he frequently visited relatives in Venice, and viewed church paintings there. Veronese's *The Marriage at Cana* (1562-64), a thirty-two-foot work executed expressly for San Giorgio Maggiori in Venice he viewed in the Louvre.

In a particularly poignant passage in his journal, Hélion writes out a *bilan*, or balance sheet, of his experiences over thirty years, and notes that, at fifty-two, he was humbled when standing before a work of Veronese's in the Louvre. The very next day he had a flash of insight: "I see All. Think, feel, conceive All. Color and construct All." For Hélion, the day-to-day search for a transcendent order translated into probing formal issues of compositional and coloristic balance. Yet throughout his career, he seemed captivated not only by his ideal of pictorial equilibrium, but also by the symbol of the scale, and by the act of judgment—the weighing of thought and material existence, the sacred and the profane. This interest culminated in *The Last Judgment of Things*, one of his late works. Exhibited for the first time in New York City in 1996, it reconciled his painterly and intellectual concerns in a supreme and definitive balance.

This late work summarizes formal practices and philosophical musings, and leads us to connect Hélion to the Cinquecento master Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), whose *The Marriage at Cana* predicates pictorial structure, balance, and an alchemical creation—Christ's transformation of water into wine—as does Hélion's triptych. According to the art critic Jed Perl, "In the *Last Judgment* we're present at the act of creation, with people and objects appearing out of the thin air of acrylic paint." And like *The Marriage at Cana* with its wedded couple at the far left of the canvas and its divine couple, Mary and Christ, in the center, *Last Judgment* introduces us to an embracing couple at left and an enigmatic union at center. Both works are of a metaphysical realm, treating earthly and spiritual mysteries.

Moreover, each of these two masterworks treats an allegorical, Christological theme in a contemporaneous manner—Hélion's, in terms of a throng at a Paris flea market with its profusion of merchandise, and Veronese's, in terms of a luxurious sixteenth-century Venetian wedding banquet with cosmopolitan guests and resplendent goods framed by the

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classical architecture of Andrea Palladio. Hélion was as intrigued by architectural possibility as Veronese. His quest for balance between theory and practice in his art, and the integration of other disciplines (mathematics, theater, architecture) into painting, attest to Hélion's quest for formal structure and equilibrium. He may be considered a modern-day Vitruvius, a master architect who expounded on such orders in his treatises during the first century B.C.E. In fact, Hélion came to Paris in 1921 to become an architect. Nearly sixty years later, he was still concerned with architectural dimensions. His overall design and use of major structural forms in *Last Judgment* looks to the Cinquecento, and particularly to Veronese, for the structure upon which to build his twenty-seven-foot painting.

Certainly, it falls within the traditions of painting to enter into dialogues with the past. In *Last Judgment*, Hélion not only remembers the flea markets of Paris from his own younger days, but also the past to which he as a painter is heir. His friend Balthus harkened back to the mathematical rigor and formal precision of Piero della Francesca's processionals in such works as *La rue* (1933-35) and *Le passage du Commerce Saint-André* (1952-54).

Hélion's triptych, like Veronese's *The Marriage at Cana*, was painted toward the latter part of his career, and both artists were underestimated at their deaths. The Renaissance master's contribution, in relation to those of his Venetian contemporaries in the Cinquecento, Titian and Tintoretto, remained unreconciled at his death—perhaps not unlike Hélion in relation to Matisse and Picasso.

By reexamining Hélion's earlier works and comparing his *Last Judgment* to Veronese's painting and late Renaissance forms in sacred music and architecture, it becomes clear that Hélion is preoccupied with scales in many senses—as representing weight and balance, the act of thought or judgment, the *scala coelestis* or heavenly stairs, and the idea of scale in music, architecture, and as tonal value in painting. He may even have used some of these themes to pun about the judgment the world had made of his endeavors. Cognizant of being underestimated, Hélion seemed to look to the next generation for a fuller appreciation of his work's complexities.

Whatever the style, Hélion sees things in terms of "moment," of philosophy or meaning, of a thing he is probing; and he considers the stability of structures. We can witness this in earlier works such as *Tensions circulares*, *Orthogonal*, etc., but such a framework exists in his realistic pictures as well. In fact, Hélion writes of seeing a leg of beef slung across a butcher's shoulder as if it were an architectural problem, defining the

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points of "tension," the "nave" of the carcass, while the white apron of the butcher "constructs itself in columns to support the animal."

In his late twenties, Hélion produced bold, spare abstractions featuring shapes which resemble a beam with two scales, such as *Equilibre* (1933-34). Forms are modeled lightly to indicate mass and spatial dimension, and seem to allude to interior rooms. Subsequent paintings such as *Figure* (1938-39) and *Figure tombée* (1939) show him equilibrating the simplest of colored shapes interspersed with crisply modeled cylinders to suggest a human form in an interior. Here, all the complexity of the figure, light, and space are distilled into a harmonious construction. The whole is a carefully conceived sum of its parts, and the success of his quirky compositions of shape and hue hang precariously in the balance. He seems to have concurred early on with Palladio's ideal that "beauty will result from form, from the relationship of each part to the whole. . .so that the [structure] becomes a complete, well-finished body whose every limb is necessary to reach the final objective."

Despite a dramatic shift to a figurative mode, in *Au cycliste* (1939) Hélion continued his preoccupation with placing formal elements to achieve a precise compositional stasis and, yet again, to form an image of the scale. Here, a prototypical urban Everyman, suited, umbrella in hand, a fedora shading his visage, strides from his front door on his way to work in the early morning light. His mannequin-like posture is encased by the crisp black of the doorway as if in a monumental vertical block. Thus this anonymous actor serves as the central beam in the artist's iconographic cityscape. On either side of this white-collar clone are two figures—an anonymous cyclist to his left and a woman at an open window on his right, her hands clasped around a potted plant whose stem rises stiffly between her breasts. These adjunct figures sit on rectilinear areas of flat muted color, looking like weighing pans in relation to the beam-like structure of the man. The composition's strict structural rhyming calls to mind the calculated elegance of a mathematical equation, as seen in Renaissance works.

Given the context of the period—the advent of mechanization, the rise of fascism, the bureaucratization of government and industry, the labor movement—and the artist's formal preoccupations, the unfolding narrative of the painting appears to represent a disturbing wrinkle when these self-contained inhabitants of a modern no-man's-land are "freeze-framed" in a disquieting equilibrium. In fact, the element of time is used to coordinate, in the complex formal structure, historical reference as well as narrative sequence. What is seemingly a moment in a mundane

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morning cityscape calls to mind something of the psychological power of Sartre's *La nausée* (1938), in which we feel all too clearly the nothingness in the core of modern life.

Hélion builds on his concern for balance and structure like an architect, but he also pushes color for maximum impact. Whereas in previous works he used a muted palette to represent the scales of tonal value, in *La belle etrusque* (1948) Hélion employs a hot orange hue for almost the entire surface of the canvas, and creates tone with flat areas of pale pinks, yellows, and warm browns, using chromatic brilliance rather than lights and darks as Veronese did in late works. In this daring painterly feat—bizarre subject matter, outrageous color, and downright wacky drafting—he again invents stasis, teetering on the brink of new possibility.

In the early 1950s, the tone of Hélion's work changes to detachment, to a sense of withdrawal and philosophical musing. These works are mostly somber, pensive studio scenes of still lifes, models, and self-portraits. Instead of viewing naturalism as a detente in his career or a slackening of inventiveness, Hélion consciously employs realism in the service of unorthodoxy, as abstraction itself was becoming restrictive.

In 1954, in a realist self-portrait entitled *Le peintre*, he depicts himself in the act of weighing. He wrote about his uncompromising inner motivation: "Painting becomes an avowal of faith in the validity of existence." In *Le peintre*, we find the genesis for *The Last Judgment of Things* as Hélion seems to weigh the intangible against the material, abstraction against reality, the sacred against the profane. Here, he is not only "the painter," but also the thinker, the philosopher. In this full-length self-portrait in oil on canvas, Hélion places himself in front of an easel flanked by two others in a large studio space. His left foot abuts a small stool, while his elbow, resting on his knee, supports his chin in the classic "thinker" pose. A blank canvas is on the easel directly behind him, while the flanking easels are bare. The act of pondering is juxtaposed with a profusion of objects scattered around the room. Hélion's logic for compositional balance prevails again as assorted furnishings and objects—a bench, a cot, stacked canvas stretchers, a plant—are situated in the foreground of the studio, while on the left a staircase winds upwards onto a terraced landing. *Le peintre* is a first foray into Christological subjects, and foreshadows his *Last Judgment* of twenty-five years later. People transfixed in a moment of thought as Christ turns water into wine, a proliferation of objects, and staircase with landing are also major elements of *The Marriage at Cana*.

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In his self-portrait Hélion is balanced in motion, equilibrated in the act of thinking. Camus wrote that "the revolutionary spirit felt that. . . there was consent in art [history]; that there was risk [in] contemplation counterbalancing action." Like his *Au cycliste*, Hélion is momentarily "freeze-framed," then moves on to work out the complexities of his painting. Alone in his studio, he looks out past the picture plane, indicating that it is only in the self that the drama of truth can occur. And it is in the risks of the fifties—returning to a mode of realism from which to resolve the contradictions between tonal value and flatness of the canvas field, seeking more profound metaphors for humanist issues—that we find the genesis of Hélion's long, inexorable procession toward his apotheosis, *The Last Judgment of Things*, painted when he was seventy-five.

Hélion's *Last Judgment* shares the organizing vision of the Renaissance world, in which knowledge is unified by metaphysical principles. Just as in the Cinquecento, Hélion thought of painting as inseparable from other disciplines such as architecture, theater, mathematics, and music.

In locating his work in art history, Hélion finally seems able to reconcile inner and outer dimensions, private and public realms—as earlier on, art and religion had channeled emotion. In his *Last Judgment*, he transcends those tensions in a moment of order and equilibrium, the meaning inextricably locked into the form. Only those who understand the structure can fully decipher the meaning, like a Renaissance puzzle. Sitting in Hélion's chapel, surrounded on three sides by his painting, we *hear* the very song which emanates from his Venetian-inspired "colorito." In its present placement of three canvases on one wall, *Last Judgment* is viewed all at once, in the space of a moment; but as placed on three walls in the clockwise-wraparound sequence of the oratorio, it can only be apprehended like a piece of music—through time. Thus Hélion keys his colors to the triadic harmonies of Renaissance music, a mathematical scale of measured time. Indeed, his triptych is about the passage of time—harkening back to the Paris flea markets of his youth, to his life and work, and to his painterly heritage of over four hundred years.

Symbolically, Hélion includes a small hourglass in the third canvas of the triptych, a Christological allusion perhaps drawn from *The Marriage at Cana*. In Veronese's work, it sits upon the musician's table but bears no literal significance to the playing of music, as a metronome would; instead, it relates to Christ's realization, "Mine hour is not yet come."

Thus Hélion's *Last Judgment* is a simultaneous rendition of all scales, a final *tour de force*. Yet for some the question may remain: Why construct

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not just a painting, but an imaginary chapel and hymn as well? Perhaps because a mural is a public creation, and Hélion was an intensely private person, an internal exile, not chiefly devoted to the struggle for honor, but engaged in his art.

Even Picasso only likened himself to Christ in his *Ecce Homo: Le théâtre de Picasso* prints (1970), based on Rembrandt's prints of *Christ Presented to the People* (1655). His aquatint *Horse with rider and man with fantastic head-dress* (1970) is only an excerpt of attendant figures from Rembrandt's drypoint *The Three Crosses* (1653). And Matisse's chapel wasn't to provide self-aggrandizement, but to adorn a house of worship, thus enhancing the devotional practice of others. Hélion, instead, seems to have humbly assumed the mythic role of the playful, childlike trickster. In *The Last Judgment of Things*, he alternately guides us to and bars us from the act of witness. Indeed, he himself seems Veronese's mischievous Cupid, who both leads the viewer, like Mars's warhorse, to apprehend the union of the gods atop the spiral staircase as in *Mars and Venus Interrupted by Cupid* (1561) and, as in *Mars and Venus Bound by Cupid* (1578), he restrains us—as he does the curious horse—from viewing that most passionate of mysteries, as well as the mysteries of his own creative processes.

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RICHARD MOORE

Gogol's "Overcoat"

"We have all come out of the folds of 'The Overcoat."

Dostoyevsky's remark suggests the decisive importance of Gogol's great story for the flowering of Russian fiction in the nineteenth century. But what is it, that "Overcoat"? It has seemed to change remarkably over the years. For Belinsky and other critics when it first appeared, the story seemed a humanitarian cry for sympathy for the downtrodden. In his paragraph of summation after his hero's death, Gogol himself seems to take this view:

> So vanished and disappeared for ever a human being whom no one ever thought of protecting, who was dear to no one, in whom no one was the least interested, not even the naturalist who cannot resist sticking a pin in a common fly and examining it under the microscope; a being who endured the mockery of his colleagues without protesting, who went to his grave without any undue fuss, but to whom, nonetheless (although not until his last days) a shining visitor in the form of an overcoat suddenly appeared, brightening his wretched life for one fleeting moment; a being upon whose head disaster had cruelly fallen, just as it falls upon the kings and great ones of this earth.

But this is a choral statement. Like the often bland observations of the choruses in Sophoclean tragedy, it gives the audience a possible view of the play's events and shows us what the ordinary and perhaps rather obtuse citizen might think. In some ways Gogol's paragraph fits the action; in other ways it conspicuously fails to do so. If we ignore the phrase "without protesting," it fits nicely with the hero Akaky's cry to his fellow workers near the beginning of the story: "Leave me alone, why do you have to torment me?" But this cry gets most of its power through its contrast with the comic exaggeration and absurdity that surrounds it. Akaky Akakievitch's very name—it might have been translated "Shit, son of Shit," or perhaps (to get the baby-talk flavor of the Russian) "Doo-doo, son of Doo-doo"—and numerous other details establish him

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as a gross caricature. As even that choral paragraph acknowledges, he is less interesting than a housefly. Who sympathizes with houseflies?

But Akaky as insect won't do either. That is merely the view of his shallow co-workers, who are themselves merely figments of Petersburg's empty dreamworld. Neither of these views fit with what is clearly the central passion of Akaky's existence:

> One would be hard put to find a man anywhere who so lived for his work. To say that he worked with zeal would be an understatement: no, he worked *with love*. In that copying of his he glimpsed a whole varied and pleasant world of his own. One could see the enjoyment on his face. Some letters were his favorites, and whenever he came to write them out he would be beside himself with excitement, softly laughing to himself and winking, willing his pen on with his lips, so you could tell what letter his pen was carefully tracing just by looking at him. Had his rewards been at all commensurate with his enthusiasm, he might perhaps have been promoted to state councillor, much to his own surprise.

He even brings his office copying home with him and copies other things "for his own personal pleasure." Business and pleasure are the same; there is no work for him: life is all play, as it was for Adam before the Fall. Akaky lives in a state of blessedness. Even thinking of copying, he notices nothing else. Only when horses bump into him and breathe on him, does "he realize that he was not in the middle of a sentence but in the middle of the street."

Sentence and street, art and life: does Akaky's copying stand for Gogol's art? The relish in the description quoted above suggests it. Gogol was a wonderful mimic and performer of his own work. Apparently it was that mischievous urge to imitate—that child's play, according to Aristotle—that, more than any intellectual endowment or social commitment, was his imagination's driving force. Gogol's contemporaries complained about his irresponsible lack of social concerns and positive messages, and he himself was evidently troubled by these failings. Mere mimicry, like Akaky's mere copying, was clearly a lower form of mental activity than that usually practiced by mature and socially aware adults. Surely this resemblance between mimicry and copying cannot have escaped Gogol, and it plays a major role in the story's complexities, which have been celebrated more recently by Vladimir Nabokov (though with very little specific detail).

Clearly Akaky's ecstatic love of copying contradicts Gogol's choral summary. Far from being "a shining visitor. . .brightening his wretched

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life," the overcoat and Akaky's attachment to it ruin his state of blessedness. Once it appears, copying is forgotten, blotted out by "real life." "All these [thoughts about the overcoat] very nearly turned his mind. Once he was not far from actually making a *copying mistake*, so that he almost cried 'Ugh!' and crossed himself."

In one interpretation of the Biblical story of the Fall of Man, Adam's primal state of bliss was destroyed, not by his violation of God's commandment, but by his longing for Eve and her creation. Gogol's fear of women and apparent chastity are well known and are reflected elsewhere in his fiction—in "Diary of a Madman" and in *Ivan Fyodorovitch Shponka and His Aunt*, for example.

Then is that "shining visitor in the form of an overcoat" Adam Akaky's Eve? Gogol's answer to that question is loud and clear:

> He even trained himself to go without any food at all in the evenings, for his nourishment was *spiritual*, his thoughts always full of that overcoat which one day was to be his. From that time onwards his whole life seemed to have become richer, as though he had married and another human being was by his side. It was as if he was not alone at all but had some pleasant companion who had agreed to tread life's path together with him; and this companion was none other than the overcoat with its thick cotton-wool padding and strong lining, made to last a lifetime.

That "thick cotton-wool padding" is downright obscene. Nabokov remarks that the overcoat is like a mistress, but that is too weak a term for the life companion that Gogol specifies. Even before it exists, the comforting new garment begins to change its possessor: "'A hundred and fifty rubles for an overcoat!' poor Akaky shrieked for what was perhaps the first time in his life—he was well known for his low voice."

But if Eve is the agent of Adam's destruction, it could not have been God who created her; it must have been the Devil. This thought seems to have inspired Gogol's description of Petrovitch, the one-eyed ruffian and former serf who repairs "trousers and frock-coats whenever—it goes without saying—he was sober and was not hatching some plot in that head of his." Seeking him out, Akaky seems to be visiting the infernal regions—climbing stairs "running with water and slops. . .saturated with that strong smell of spirit which makes the eyes smart and is a perpetual feature of all backstairs in Petersburg." In Petrovitch's flat itself, "his wife had been frying some kind of fish and had made so much smoke in the kitchen that not even the cockroaches were visible."

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It is useful for a great writer to be aware of things like the importance of stereoscopic vision for judging depth in close work. We have almost forgotten that Petrovitch only has one eye when we are reminded of the fact, hearing him trying to thread a needle: "Why won't you go through, you swine! You'll be the death of me, you devil!" That last word keeps cropping up in connection with Petrovitch. Akaky had hoped to find him agreeably drunk, "as his wife put it, 'after he'd bin swigging that corn brandy again, the old one-eyed devil!'"—but instead finds him "sober. . .and in the right mood for charging the devil's own price."

After the creation of Eve comes the Temptation proper. Akaky is invited to a party, signifying his entrance into the unreal world of Petersburg, from which his simplicity, poverty, and devotion to copying had excluded—perhaps we should say, exempted—him. As Gogol had said earlier:

> No one could remember ever having seen him at a party. After he had copied to his heart's content he would go to bed, smiling in anticipation of the next day and what God would send him to copy.

But now all this has changed, and Akaky reflects that going to "the party would give him the opportunity of going out in his new overcoat that very same evening." Not just the comforts of the overcoat, pride and vanity about having them have made their entrance as well.

The retribution for this lapse from the heavenly state is swift and sure. It is the presence of the myth of the Fall which makes the sudden theft of the overcoat seem so right, so inevitable. It is right, too—esthetically right—that it happens in the vast and deserted square, which seems to stand for the emptiness of Petersburg and its parties.

And if the overcoat thief is the Angel of God, then somehow the Very Important Person, whose foolish arrogance finally destroys Akaky completely, is a kind of mocking Petersburg representation of God Himself, who, in the end, like the Old Testament's God of Wrath, repents His sternness with Man.

Above all, there is Akaky—who is below all. There is this strange, new, deeply disturbing phenomenon of nature that Gogol has discovered: this anti-hero, this housefly that stands for man and his tragic destiny. He is a uniquely Russian discovery, and it was in Russia that he first proliferated—in Dostoyevsky's idiot-saint Myshkin and whore-saint Sonya, Tolstoy's Pierre and Platon Karataev, and Chekhov's Darling and Lipa Tzybukin. Out of the folds of "The Overcoat" they came indeed. Gogol's Eve has been the mother of many.

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MAXIM D. SHRAYER

Anti-Semitism and the Decline of Russian Village Prose

How do we negotiate between an author's aesthetic achievement and ethical abomination? How do we make sense of a writer who speaks with artistic honesty about his native people, and yet with blindness and hostility about ethnic and religious groups this writer deems alien to the culture and spirit of his land? In studying the dynamics of an author's career, should we seek to identify explosions of intolerance on the trajectory of an author's growth and change? Even a brief glance at the heated discussion that followed the publication of Anthony Julius's *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1995) is enough to convince us that allegations of a given writer's religious or ethnic prejudice can and often do polarize the critics' judgments about the writer.

In Russia's cultural space, where writers debate political issues in daily newspapers and politicians compose novels and poems in jail, an author's position on the Jewish question has often served as both a barometer and shaper of public opinion. From the 1860s onward, Russian writers have played a key role in formulating and presenting the Jewish question to the public at large. From my perspective, the main problem is not the novelty or profundity of a Russian author's writing against the Jews, but rather the fact that anti-Semitic ideas were given national legitimacy by being sandwiched between profound discussions of Russian people and brilliant descriptions of the Russian countryside. In studying anti-Semitism in literature, I have focused not only on the meaning of the message about the Jews—a message that is more often than not crude and pedestrian—but also on the ideological and cultural codes that engender it. This brings me to the following inquiry into the dynamics of the Jewish question in the writings of Russian Village Prose.

The dissonant voices of the *derevenshchiki* (Village Writers) were especially manifest on the Soviet literary scene in the 1970s and early 1980s. Although never directly anti-Soviet, these writers managed to be critical of what they perceived to be the causes of the disintegration of

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Russian village life. In the mid-1970s, due in part to the growing activities of the Russian ultra-nationalist movement within the Soviet cultural establishment, as well as the repercussions of the increasing exodus of Soviet Jews, many Village Writers embraced a tendentious narrative of twentieth-century Russian history. Among other things in this narrative, the Jews were held responsible for destroying the Russian village as the backbone of Russian life, turning Russia into a secular country, controlling and manipulating Russian culture and media, and finally, abandoning Russia on the brink of a national disaster. Surely, the Russian Village Writers were neither the first nor the last—in Russia or elsewhere—to blame their country's hardships on the Jews. What makes them so fascinating to a student of the Jewish question is the cohesion and intensity with which they acted "the role of mediator," to employ René Girard's term, by bridging the "gap between the insignificance of the individual [be it an ethnic Russian or a Jew] and the enormity of the social body."

The literary model that has suggested my mode of inquiry finds its most famous example in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). According to this dynamic model, ethical degradation inevitably leads to aesthetic disfigurement. The decline of Russian Village Prose came not only owing to the stagnation and impeding end of the Soviet system, but also as a result of a conflict of an artist and a nationalist thinker within the Village Writers. Unable or unwilling to write of the Jews with the same truthfulness and responsibility as they did of the Russians, some Village Writers expressed their anger and confusion in extremist discursive statements, while others turned away from the fictions of village life to mediocre urban or historical prose.

Below I will consider briefly the careers of three preeminent representatives of Russian Village Prose, Viktor Astaf'ev (b. 1924), Valentin Rasputin (b. 1937), and Vasilii Belov (b. 1934). These writers exhibit different trajectories in postwar Soviet literature, that of a war veteran, a self-made intellectual, and a peasant Communist.

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Orphaned as a teenager, the prolific Viktor Astaf'ev was decorated for heroic conduct in World War II and worked a number of menial jobs before turning to writing. From his first publications in the 1950s onward, Astaf'ev's works have been marked by a hostility toward the intelligentsia, whose members, not infrequently Jewish, are shown to display haughtiness and limited understanding of the life of the common

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Russian folk. With a few exceptions, Astaf'ev depicts Jewish characters negatively and stereotypically as dishonest, arrogant, and cowardly. In *Poslednii poklon* [*The Last Bow*, 1968-1988; 1989; here and hereafter all translations from the Russian are mine]—a long cycle of stories and memoiristic sketches—an autobiographical protagonist recalls an encounter with a Jewish schoolteacher, Sof'ia Veniaminovna. Astaf'ev describes her as a "red-headed little bird, commonly inhabiting Russian forests, a pretty bird, but furtive, sneaky and terribly annoying"—hardly a loving image of Russian Jews. In a bout of hatred for Jews and intellectuals, the young ruffian physically assaults the teacher. The story is recalled by the adult author who still finds the Jewish teacher repulsive, and his teenage self worthy of praise. In several places, Astaf'ev employs anti-Jewish allegories and double entendres, such as a reference to Jewish repairmen who have ruined a Russian writer's "golden pen."

Only in one work, not surprisingly his greatest, did Astaf'ev attempt to go beyond anti-Jewish stereotypes. His masterpiece, *Tsar'-ryba* [*Czar-Fish*, 1977], is a discontinuous novel, a group of tales loosely connected structurally by the author-protagonist's unifying persona. Set in Siberia between the 1930s and the 1970s, *Czar-Fish* laments the disappearance of the collective spirit of familial and neighborly love and support among denizens of rural communities, a spirit idealized in the childhood episodes set on the Siberian river Enisei and its tributaries. Especially brilliant and telling of the writer's nostalgia for the pastoral are the early childhood scenes, where the writer's own recollections are merged with fictional memories of his privileged protagonist Akim, whose name derives from the Hebrew for "G-d will lift up."

In *Czar-Fish*, Astaf'ev deals with the Jewish question with a depth that none of his other works can match. The early-to-middle 1970s, when he was working on the book, were the time of Astaf'ev's transition from the cardboard portrayals of Jews in his earlier fiction to the overtly and viciously anti-Semitic discursive statements he would make in the middle-to-late 1980s. Brooding over the devastation of Russian nature and decrying the rise of both extreme individualism and greed among his fellow citizens, Astaf'ev sought to find a mythopoetic model of and a truthful—truthful in his mind—explanation for the losses of environmental and human values. In *Czar-Fish*, several motifs of the Gospel narratives of Christ's preaching and martyrdom are superimposed on the archetypal fratricidal story of Cain and Abel. The relations between the Russians and the Jews find an allegorical embodiment in the story of fishing as both soul-searching and Christ-killing. At the same time, the relationship between the Russians and the Jews is presented as a triangle of desire, in

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which the competition is literally for a woman and figuratively for Russia herself.

A central sequence of the novel tells about the two Utrobin brothers, two fishermen, whose lives in a remote Siberian village are scarred by mutual hostility and visions of fratricide (the last name Utrobin derives from the Russian noun *utroba* meaning "womb"). While poaching, the older brother hooks a giant sturgeon, which the local folklore refers to as "Czar-Fish." The fish is so big and powerful that the older Utrobin cannot handle it alone. He considers summoning his brother for help but decides against it. As the fisherman struggles to pull the fish into the boat it capsizes, and he is caught on his own lines. The bleeding fish and the bleeding man are now literally connected. The fish eventually unhooks itself and breaks free, leaving the fisherman either to die or to be rescued by his brother—one cannot tell from the open ending. While the Utrobin brothers are ethnic Russians, it is the Old Testament motif of fratricide—coupled as it is with killing a fish as an allegory of killing Christ—that suggests a mythopoetic treatment of the Jewish question. If Astaf'ev, who refers to the giant sturgeon as "Czar" (recall Christ's royal lineage, but also the murder of Czar Nicholas II and his family in 1918), is indeed attempting a complex allegory of the relationship between the Russians and the Jews, his vision might amount to the following. On the one hand, from a conventional anti-Semitic perspective shared by many Russian nationalists, the Jews are collectively held responsible for the killing of Christ (and the last Russian Czar). In this sense, the older Utrobin brother acts as a "Jew" in trying to slay the Czar-Fish. (In fact, several Jewish poachers appear in the novel.) On the other hand, anti-Semitism itself, and such extreme forms of it as the killing of Jews, reproduces the act of Christ-killing. This second perspective goes back to early Christianity (e.g., St. Bernard of Clairvaux) and finds much prominence in the writings of Russian religious philosophers, especially Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Berdiaev. Thus, in oppressing their Jewish brothers, ethnic Russians commit reprehensible and anti-Christian acts.

What made Astaf'ev employ Biblical allegories to depict the Russian-Jewish relations in his native country? It is not unlikely that he was alarmed by the fact that Soviet Jews were applying for exit visas in increasing numbers in the early-to-middle 1970s. (Between 1972 and 1974, when Astaf'ev wrote *Czar-Fish*, some eighty-five thousand Jews left the Soviet Union.) Furthermore, Astaf'ev's perspective on the Jewish question changed while he was writing the novel, and as is often the case, repentance led to shame and further malice. The latter chapters

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consistently depict the Jews as guilty of ravaging the Russian countryside and of treating the Russian people with arrogance and superiority. Astaf'ev revealed a rabid intolerance against the Jews with the utmost clarity and directness in the character of Georgii (Goga) Gertsev—a predator and profiteer. Still, Astaf'ev concluded his novel with a rendition of the first eight verses of chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. Speaking of "a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace," the writer thus left some hope for the renewal of a Russian-Jewish dialogue. From here Astaf'ev's career might have gone in opposite directions, one of tolerance or one of hostility and denial. He chose the latter path.

In 1984, a popular Moscow review of foreign literature, *Inostrannaia literatura*, printed a translation of Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*. Less than two years later, Astaf'ev published *Pechal'nyi detektiv* [*A Sad Detective*], a novel that draws a horrific picture of a provincial Soviet city in the mid-1980s. In the same year, he also published the infamous short story "Lovlia peskarei v Gruzii" ["Catching Cudgeons in Georgia"]. In August of 1986, Astaf'ev received a letter from Natan Èidel'man (1930-1989), a Moscow historian of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russian culture. Èidel'man's letter, written not from the vantage point of a Jewish nationalist, but rather a liberal who is repulsed by any display of prejudice—be it against Georgians, Jews, or Kazakhs—contained a warning that Astaf'ev had betrayed his talent by succumbing to intolerance and xenophobia. Astaf'ev replied in the most intemperate manner. Èidel'man wrote his second, final letter, and the correspondence quickly became —in the words of the émigré writer Vl. Solovyov—a bestseller of late Soviet *samizdat*. What strikes one most about Astaf'ev's reply—even more than its malevolent anger stemming from a sense of cultural inferiority—is a complete lack of independent thinking about the Jewish question. Astaf'ev made three main points in his letter. First he accused the Jews of being the enemies of the Russian national renaissance; according to Astaf'ev, they controlled Russian culture and regarded ethnic Russians with intellectual arrogance and contempt. Then he stated that the Jews destroyed Russian Orthodoxy and Monarchy, and were guilty of regicide: "the [last Czar and his family] were executed by the Jews and the Latvians, headed by the inveterate, double-dyed Zionist Iurkovskii [*sic*; Astaf'ev refers to the Bolshevik Iurovskii]." Lastly, Astaf'ev suggested the problems that Jews encountered in the Soviet Union were a consequence of their own crimes against Russia, the crimes for which they were now paying.

Astaf'ev thus reproduced a primitive version of Western and Russian anti-Semitic ideas, a kind of crude selection from *Protocols of the Elders*

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of Zion, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Shafarevich's *Russophobia*, and official Soviet rhetoric on Judaism and the state of Israel. In an interview he gave to the Russian-French writer Dmitrii Savitskii in 1988, Astaf'ev commented on Èidel'man's letters to him as a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Russian writers, referring to the Jews as "they," as a "nation that has a habit of sticking itself in every hole." He further revealed his inability to look for the root of the Jewish question by commenting: "They seem to have the whole world at their disposal; if it is bad here, they move to where it is better. We have nowhere to go. . . ." Finally, Astaf'ev admitted that his correspondence with Èidel'man and the scandal that ensued made him an even greater anti-Semite.

In his post-Soviet fiction, Astaf'ev returned to the subject of World War II, and to a stereotypical and predictable portrayal of Jewish characters, including a Jewish captain in the military police (*Prokliaty i ubity* [*The Damned and the Killed*, 1992]). At the same time, he has made reconciliatory statements in the press and distanced himself from ultranationalist activity. The liberal intelligentsia in Russia rewarded him by bestowing upon him the 1997 Pushkin Prize. (The writer Andrei Bitov presided over the ceremony in Moscow in May of 1997.) Tamed and neutralized as Astaf'ev might be, he will forever remain the Russian writer with some of the most viciously anti-Semitic statements to his credit.

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As compared to his older contemporary Astaf'ev, Valentin Rasputin had an early start in his literary career: a staff journalist in a provincial Siberian newspaper in 1959-1961, he had become one of the most acclaimed Russian writers by the early 1970s. Set in Siberian villages, his fiction employs natural elements as large-scale mythological metaphors for the spiritual condition of the Russian people. The river Angara suggests the river Styx in *Zhivi i pomni* [*Live and Remember*, 1975]; a flooded island, whose inhabitants have been forced to abandon their homes, symbolizes Russia herself in *Proshchanie s Matëroi* [*Farewell to Matëra*, 1976]; a fire in a small Siberian town burns with the fierceness of an apocalyptic blaze in *Pozhar* [*The Fire*, 1985]. Rasputin's works of fiction frequently employ open endings, raising the eternal questions and letting the reader find the answers. A moralist by natural inclination, Rasputin preaches only very slightly in his fictions. However, in the 1970s and early 1980s, he turned increasingly to the genre of the newspaper essay, speaking with the kind of moral authority that popular writers used to enjoy in Soviet Russia.

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By the 1980s, Rasputin had emerged as a leading spokesman for ecological causes, such as keeping lake Baikal pollution-free. He also campaigned for the preservation of historical buildings, including churches and pre-Soviet wooden architecture. While his fiction remained free of Jewish characters, anti-Jewish sentiments had crept into his discursive works by the early 1980s. Jewish names were dropped when Rasputin talked of the officials who condoned the pollution of the environment and oversaw urban renovation. Historians of Soviet anti-Semitism know that the ultra-nationalist *Pamiat'* movement (*pamiat'* means "memory" in Russian) emerged in the 1980s as a grassroots movement of citizens for preservation of historical buildings and churches. In July of 1987, Rasputin addressed the Fifth Congress of the All-Russia Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in Gor'kii (now Nizhnii Novgorod). The title of his speech was "To Sacrifice Oneself for the Sake of Truth: Against Unremembrance." Rasputin defended the *Pamiat'* movement from the attacks of the press and the "people, who have betrayed Russia, smeared her name, and later, not finding the Promised Land abroad, . . .returned" to Russia. Rasputin never mentioned the word Jew, but his allusions to Jews were quite transparent to the audience he addressed and the readers of the ultra-nationalist monthly *Nash sovremennik* [*Our Contemporary*], where the speech was printed. He referred to the logic of "the interests of their caste [*kastovye interesy*]." Speaking of "some people [est' liudi] who do not like Russia regaining her memory," Rasputin disseminated anti-Semitic ideas also present in the speeches and writings of the *Pamiat'* leaders. "This is why," he continued, "they are ready to make 'memory' [*pamiat'*] and 'patriot' swear words, as they did in the 1920s, and to declare the great creations of our ancestors primitive works and nationalistic poison." (Rasputin voiced similar ideas in a speech at the Seventh Congress of Russian Writers in 1990.)

In 1990, Rasputin was interviewed by Bill Keller for an article on Russian nationalists that appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*; a year later the full text was printed in Peter Matthiessen's long essay on Siberia in the *New York Review of Books*. Rasputin's remarks on Russian-Jewish relations have raised many questions, both in Russia and in the West, about the moral integrity and intellectual honesty of a writer who had maintained so incessantly that a writer is first and foremost a mouthpiece of "truth." "I think," Rasputin told Keller, "that today the Jews should feel responsible for the sin of having carried out the revolution, and for the shape that it took. [They should feel responsible] for the terror. For the terror that existed during the revolution and especially after

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the revolution. They played a large role, and their guilt is great. Not for the killing of God, but for that." Rasputin apparently felt that he had been unfairly targeted as Russia's anti-Semitic writer. Although in the middle-to-late 1990s he abstained from making overt anti-Jewish statements, in 1997 he published "Moi manifest" ("My Manifesto"), where he spoke of Russian history as a succession of foreign dominations: German, French, Jewish, American. His fictional output has diminished even further. Rasputin's recent short stories—dark, post-Soviet lamentations—are virtually free of anti-Semitism, as the ideologue has not completely ousted the writer of fiction.

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A BLOND NORTHERNER with the bearded face of a Viking, Vasilii Belov joined the Communist Party at twenty-four. He began his career as a local Komsomol apparatchik and an epigone of peasant poets. The publication of the short novel *Privychnoe delo* [*The Usual Thing*, 1966] made him instantly famous. The Russian nationalist wing of the Writers' Union targeted him as one of their spokesmen, and exaggerated his talent and originality in reviews. Vadim Kozhinov, the *éminence grise* of the nationalist cultural movement, wrote homiletic articles about Belov and his fiction. Belov's artistic forte are first-person tales which capture the language and mind-set of his native peasants of the North of European Russia. Combining elements of *skaz* narration with peasant and *kolkhoz* folklore, Belov's tales were an alternative to much of the formulaic Soviet writing about the village.

Belov's anti-Semitism is of the most consistent and political kind. Expressed primarily through fiction, it is the least camouflaged by patriotism and soul-searching. In *Tseluiutsia zori* [*The Dawns Kiss*, 1975]—a screenplay that Belov published as a short novel—the peasant characters come upon A. B. Fokel'man, a caricature of a Jewish dentist. In *Vospitanie po doktoru Spoku* [*Child-Rearing According to Dr. Spock*, 1968; 1978], an alcoholic protagonist leaves his family and temporarily stays in the apartment of his Jewish co-worker Misha Fridburg. This is the narrator's comment about Fridburg's household: "But after two nights, spent in the orderly, falsely benevolent atmosphere of the Jewish family, he went to stay with uncle Pasha [a Russian friend]." Belov stirs up resentment of the Jews by drawing on the stereotype of a tightly knit and functional Jewish family—as opposed to the Russian protagonist's own dysfunctional family.

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In the early 1970s, Belov embarked on a new project, a cycle of historical novels about the destruction of the Russian village during the Soviet period. This was the kind of scapegoating that the right-wing circles within the literary establishment, the Communist Party, and the KGB certainly encouraged, as it distracted the people from the present by offering a salutary anti-Semitic narrative of the past. Prior to the appearance of the complete edition, the first novel in Belov's cycle, *Kanuny: Roman-khronika kontsa 20-kh godov* (*The Eves: Novel-Chronicle of the Late 1920s*, 1972-1976-1987; 1988), was published in parts, in a regional journal, then in a publishing house with a nationalist orientation, then in a leading literary review *Novyi mir*. The title refers to the time when preparations for the massive collectivization were being mounted in the rural areas of Russia. The anti-Jewish thrust of his novel becomes immediately apparent. From the top down to the local level, the Party line is enforced by the Jews, who feel no connection to the land or its people.

The Eves afforded a foretaste of Belov's potential for making historical fiction a domain of anti-Semitic myths. The real explosion came in the next installment, *God velikogo pereloma: Khronika nachala 30-kh godov* (*The Year of the Great Turn: Chronicle of the Early 1930s*, 1989-1994; 1994). Hailed by the right-wing critics, it portrayed collectivization and the massive arrests, disenfranchisement, and exile of peasants as an anti-Russian and anti-Christian conspiracy. Here is a quote from the second paragraph, stylized as a chronicle penned by a monk: "In the summer of 1929. . .the son of a Grodno pharmacist Iakov Arkad'evich Epshtein (Iakovlev) was appointed in the Moscow Kremlin a Commissar over all Christians and peasants [*nad vsemi khristiany i zemlepashtsy*]." The ending borrows from the Orthodox liturgy, uses an Old Russian instrumental case of the noun "khristianin" (a Christian), and plays on the fact that in Old Russian the word for peasant, "krest'ianin" was sometimes used in place of the word for Christian, "khristianin." Belov treats collectivization as a Jewish plot, masterminded by Lev Trotsky and executed by Jewish Bolsheviks. The Jews are linked with satanic forces—a motif one also finds in other Russian fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, including Leonid Leonov's last novel *Piramida* [*The Pyramid*]. The Jewish minister of agriculture Iakovlev carries in his briefcase pages "strewn with those signs of Satan which programmed the life, or rather the death, of millions of people." Iakovlev's committee on collectivization is referred to jocularly as "zloveshchii sinklit," roughly an "ominous gathering." An Orthodox priest Father Perovskii says to a mid-level Jewish official in charge of

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collectivization: "You have risen against Christ. And that is why you are the Antichrist." Later the priest asks the Commissar, "Why do you hate Christianity so much?" thereby affirming the familiar anti-Semitic idea that collectivization was a markedly Jewish, messianic offensive against Russian peasants as Christians. Towards the end of the novel, writing of the Sixteenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, Belov sinks to the basest kind of defamatory anti-Semitism by grossly distorting the number of Jewish delegates and Jewish members. Here is a characteristic quote that precedes a list of Jewish-sounding last names: "The compilers of the lists of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission still knew the Russian alphabet." In Belov's novel Stalin speaks of the Jews as "the mightiest force in the party" and refers to Lazar Kaganovich, the only Jewish member of his Politburo in 1930, as "passionate Zionist." The novel ends with a suggestion that the "devilish whirlwind" was only "testing its merciless forces," promising a continuation of Belov's anti-Semitic histrionics.

Finally, a brief mention should be made of Belov's novel *Vsë vperedi* [*All Is Yet to Come*, 1987]. A weak imitation of the language and style of Soviet urban novelists, mainly Iurii Trifonov and Daniil Granin, this work further testifies to Belov's unwillingness to explore the roots of the Jewish question. The main subject is Jewish emigration, which is presented as a threat to Russian nationhood. Belov makes use of a number of myths that are familiar to historians of intolerance, including the myth that the male members of a minority (Jews) desire women of the religious or ethnic majority (Russians) in whose midst they live. One of the protagonists, a Jewish engineer Mikhail Brish, pines after his former classmate Liuba, a Russian beauty married to another former classmate, a talented experimental engineer Medvedev. The novel begins with a trip to Paris in 1974, where Brish tries to manipulate a Jewish friend into having a sexual affair with Liuba so that it would create a rift between her and her husband. They make a bet, and a bottle of White Horse whiskey is the wager. The tritely apocalyptic white horse (from Revelation 19:11) resurfaces several times throughout the novel and presumably symbolizes how the West and the Jews have joined forces to corrupt the Russian family. A rather clumsily plotted explosion in the lab results in Medvedev's arrest and exile, and Brish soon takes his place at work. He also replaces him at home by marrying Liuba and adopting Medvedev's two children. The novel's second part is set in 1984, as Medvedev resurfaces in his children's lives while Brish contemplates emigration to America. Several anti-Semitic ideas are invoked by the narrator and in the dialogues between Medvedev and Ivanov, an alcoholic

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substance-abuse specialist resurrected from Belov's early prose. In particular, vile and despicable things are openly proclaimed about Judaism as a religion that allegedly "permits to kill members of other confessions." Ivanov preaches to Medvedev about the existence of "a mighty, organized, malevolent and secret force" that acts by "dividing and ruling"—a formulation almost word for word from the *Protocols*. Brish's manipulations are made into an allegory of what the Jews do to the Russians. Ivanov points out to Medvedev that "in order to destroy a people. . .it is enough to divide the children and the parents, to turn the women against the men." At the very end of the book, Ivanov warns his friend that Brish is intent on leaving the country and taking with him both his Russian wife and his adopted Russian children: "When you make a decision, they will be in Arkansas [not a very likely place for a Soviet Jew to emigrate to] or something like that. You have betrayed your children!" Advancing an unequivocally political and nationalist cause, this novel truly marked the aesthetic decline of the Village Prose in the late 1980s.

• • •

In the third—and final—knot of the Èidel'man-Astaf'ev correspondence, the Russian-Jewish historian made a seminal pronouncement on the destiny of a writer who embarks on a path of anti-Semitism: "Our argument. . .is very simply resolved: if you can still write well, or even better, while also keeping intact your present way of thinking, then you are right. But you will not be able to. You will follow the example of [Vasilii] Belov, who has so overcome his own gift with malevolence that he has learned to write perfectly talentless prose. . . ." This, to my mind, is the highest point of the entire exchange. It has been noted—by Iu. Karabchievskii and others—that in his first letter Èidel'man appears too charitable towards Astaf'ev, overlooking the obvious fact that in his "honesty" about and his "aching" for Russia (these are Èidel'man's words), Astaf'ev makes no attempt to understand his Jewish compatriots, treating them consistently as threatening aliens. Be this as it may, Èidel'man is absolutely right in his final judgment about the destinies of Russian village writers.

Village Writers brought their aesthetic decline upon themselves by subscribing to a vehemently anti-Semitic narrative of Russian and Soviet history. While allowing themselves to be manipulated by career anti-Semites such as the critic Vadim Kozhinov or the poet and publicist Stanislav Kuniaev, the Village Writers had nearly strangled the artists within themselves by the middle of the 1980s. It was inevitable that they

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would channel anti-Semitic ideas through interviews and other discursive public statements, committing the writer's greatest mistake by making politics their literature. Ironically, despite their insistence on the artist's responsibility for maintaining his nation's memory (*pamiat'*), their statements on the Jewish question reveal a complete indifference to—but surely not an ignorance of—the incessant anti-Semitism of the Soviet system from the first postwar decade to the late 1980s. Clearly, not every silence constitutes an act of endorsement. In this case, by blaming the Jews for the decline of the Russian village and traditional Russian Orthodox culture, while simultaneously refusing to treat the Jews with the same honesty as they have the ethnic Russians, the Village Writers have endorsed both popular and state-sponsored anti-Semitic practices of the Soviet period. They have, one might add, paid a price for the choices they made by becoming a marginal segment of post-Soviet Russian culture.

Thinking of the decline of the Russian Village Prose in the mid-1980s, one is reminded of the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose 1948 book *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* [*What is Literature?* 1948], still remains one of the most important explorations of intolerance in literature. Speaking of the writer's freedom and responsibility in connection with racism, Sartre said this: "Thus, I require of all freedoms that they demand the liberation of colored people against the white race and against myself insofar as I am a part of it, but nobody can suppose for a moment that it is possible to write a good novel in praise of anti-Semitism."

COMING SOON IN PARTISAN REVIEW:

- **Eugene Goodheart** on Elias Canetti
- **Norman Manea** "Berenger at Bard"
- **Ronald Radosh** on Intellectuals & Communism
- Reviews by **Stephen Miller, Sanford Pinsker, Igor Webb** & **Susan Miron**
- Fiction by **Ivo Andrič** & **Sharona Ben-Tov**
- Poetry by **Robert Bly, Stephen Sandy, Rebecca Seiferle,** & **Adam Kirsch**

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Poems

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Pont du Carrousel

Just in the way, on the bridge, I saw the blind man stand,
Stone gray, stone still, and always the same,
Like a border-mark. But we have lost the name
Of the country he marks. He is that stubborn thing around
Which, as though he were the pole, the great
Sky-figures amble and swagger on their route.

He is the Good, which doesn't budge for the crowd
That shoves past him in the road.
He marks our passage to an underworld
To which we stroll or dance or else are hurled.

Translated from the German by Millicent Bell

C. DALE YOUNG

The Architects of Time

had grown to love absence,
and so, the lot had to be vacant
except for the lone tree.
The first, on arrival, would

throw his hands up, reaffirm
that with a gesture he could
return the leaves to the branches.
Another, tired from the journey,

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would lie down
and, closing his eyes, hasten
the demise of the locusts.
It was always the same.

A week, a century, the empty lot.
The last architect, the great
philosopher, was late as usual—
when they talked about the end,

he would laugh and remind them
they were now at the mercy
of the scientists, without whom
the architects would cease to exist.

MARY JO BANG

Night Falling Fast

Was he gone for good? Or only an hour? Louise could never tell.
His hat was an after-
image fixed to the list of her eye. Was he tall and narrow,
did he wear white socks with black shoes, a fashion forgot-
ten so long ago but recently reborn as retro? Was he missing
to her? Had her heart's heart ever truly been his?

Or did she belong to whomever was wearing her arm
on his neck; her lip's sweetish lavender kiss
still hung in the air-
less room. Night falling fast in a shadowed locale
where a thin line could mean either fact or forensics:
the track of a fracture or the time it might take to wrap up a body.

The China dog tugged at its leash while in the radium light,
center and slightly, a zebra stood standing still.
The day had been ethereal until. . .
And where was the other when she needed a friend

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to whom she could lend an ear
in return for a bed that was wider than one?

Her eyes remained anchored
on some furry distance, a furrow eased from her brow.
Let yourself go, she said to herself, and she did
know how after all. The night continued the day.
A murder of crows went by. What would she have?
The last beloved restored

to canvas and hanging a knife through his heart?
Or a new who excelled where others had fizzled to Fail,
floundering fish on a shoal. Let go the leash
of the bad dogs that are dragging you this way and that.
And indeed, the hand could unclapse (Look at that!).
The leash fell at her feet.

Across the room, five fish in a tank made six meager moves,
the last through the castle that kept them
denizens of the splendid
language they spoke sotto voce.

KAY RYAN

Death by Fruit

Only the crudest
of the *vanitas* set
ever thought you *had* to get
a skull into the picture
whether you needed
its tallowy color
near the grapes or not.
Others, stopping to consider
shapes and textures,
often discovered that
eggs or aubergines

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went better, or leeks,
or a plate of string beans.
A skull is so dominant.
It takes so much
bunched up drapery,
such a ponderous
display of ornate cutlery,
just to make it less prominent.
The greatest masters
preferred the subtlest *vanitas*,
modestly trusting to fruit baskets
to whisper *ashes to ashes*,
relying on the poignant exactness
of oranges to release
like a citrus mist
the always fresh fact
of how hard we resist
how briefly we're pleased.

BROOKS HAXTON

I AM

> *And he hath put a new song in my mouth,*
> *even praise unto our God* . . . Psalm 40

The fog I call the world is not a cloud of atoms
only, but a cloud of feelings, and ideas. I mind
my little bumps. I grieve. I think about non-being.
All I do is what my flesh can do, yet everything
my flesh can do feels strange. I am the swelling
of a salt sea onto an armature of chalk, the calm
of a tidal pool where brain cells live, the wind,
the lightning storm where thought flares into thought.
I taste damp sparks inside my tongue. If sayings
gather under the name of Faith, or Art, I let them
when they let me let them, and my mind clears.

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VALERIE WOHLFELD

The Brown Thrasher's Song

In a patch of elm and willow, branches gathered me up
and my fist fell into an oriole's nest fragrant with grapevine.
Below, my mother sat in the house drinking her special potion.
Steeped cinnamon, milfoil and raspberry leaves.
Moving slower and slower, summer into autumn.
A woman came to our house, reading my mother's hands:
wavy furrows on the palms that combed, bathed me
sometimes hurriedly, sometimes with endless care,
I not knowing motives behind their conflicting caprices.
Hands' tergiversations which were my moody caretakers:
scattered prints, clawed tracks under wave on sand
inscribed by plovers and terns. The divinator said,
"In the brown thrasher's song, pauses are a sweet note
between the other notes." My mother drove south
to pick fresh raspberry leaves for the watery tea.

The brown thrasher's speckled egg held articulated calligraphy,
as did the oriole's striated ones. In her purse, my mother
carried a string of pearls whose shine was painted on.
She didn't wear them, but caressed each bead when nervous.
The child tapped, hard little egg tooth, inside my mother.
Beads curled in my mother's hands, wearing off the glaze.
She drove and clacked her pearls, the child lost
among littered seeds and leaves of fresh-picked raspberry.

Deep in trees, I wondered if death was a bird
whispering to the ear of the newly dead,
"You may fall now, my nest opens below you."
Would the bird fasten itself to my own ear,
with rush of beating, with feathered cloak trailing,
with shiny dark eye and say,
"Come rummage through my twisted nest"?

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High among the elm, I let myself drop.
I went into the cherry-red door of home,
to help bury the child. (The door lacquered bright
as the apples my mother made each fall.
Over winesap or stayman, a poured river
of melted caramel, then dipped to pot of candy syrup.
Brittle crepitations, bitten viscous butterscotch
under tectonic plates of red shellac.) Frantic firefly,
the child lit too soon, too furiously, smelling grapevine.

I thought the oriole, or death's small bird,
called her down to night's unwinding nest.
Tablets quickly swallowed, deathly-stilled airs
of sleep: in her room, my mother's filtered gasps.
I opened her jewelry box.
From shredded, tender sarcenet inside,
I slipped my fingers around a pin's
unwieldy birds flying inside dull silver.
Alongside their silver pitch,
the brown thrasher deliberated refrains and pauses.

RAFAEL CAMPO

I Am Mrs. Lorca

—for Kim Vaeth and John Vincent

Dark love is all I've ever known; the dance
is nearly over, but I think the world
will not allow another end. The lights

burn bright, and I am married to romance,
his eyes betraying secrets that his words
conceal. He never speaks to me at night,

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our bed as arid as the flat interior
of Spain. I love him just the same, the way
he combs his hair straight back, his hands

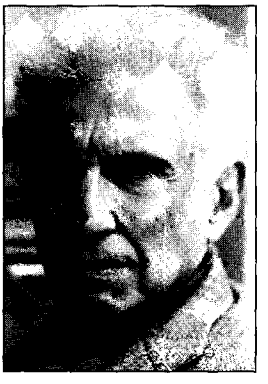
so womanly in shape. I'd be his whore,
but I am not as young as this new day,
this century we dance around;

I'd be his son, but I am not as sad
as dying is, as any son of his
inherits only death's queer finery;

right now, instead, I'm only going mad,
the dance and any meaning that it has
dissolving to the perfect thing he sees.

Does *Literary Studies* have a **Future?**

EUGENE GOODHEART



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BOOKS

Hungary and Its Communists

Political Will and Personal Belief: The Decline and Fall of Soviet Communism. By Paul Hollander. Yale University Press. $35.00.

Blacklisted: A Journalist's Life. By Paul Lendvai. St. Martin's Press. $39.50.

PAUL HOLLANDER BELONGS to the generation which lived for years under Communism and was puzzled by the power of its attraction on many Westerners and equally by the suddenness of its collapse. The more critical spirits among them felt all along the huge discrepancy between its idealistic goals and the dismal reality of life under Communism, the disunity of theory and practice. But these fatal shortcomings seemed at the time not to have a great impact on most of its believers in West and East. And then suddenly and unexpectedly the whole edifice collapsed—and it wasn't because of a lost war (as in the case of fascism). Afghanistan was, in retrospect, not more than a series of annoying flea bites. Nor did it happen as the result of an acute economic crisis; true, there was such a crisis but it was endemic, rather than a decisive political factor in the short run. Communist regimes such as China and North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba, despite their mostly dismal economic record do, after all, continue to exist, whereas the Soviet Union and Eastern European satellites collapsed.

The collapse occurred, above all, because the leaders of these regimes lost the self-confidence they and their predecessors had once shown. Or to be more precise, because they thought that while their regimes were deficient in various aspects, they could be reformed. The fact that the Soviet Union was run for many years by an ineffectual gerontocracy did not help either. However, China has also been run by groups of old and very old leaders without fatally undermining the regime. But for Gorbachev's misguided optimism concerning the chances of reform, the regime could probably have lasted ten, perhaps even twenty more years.

Underlying the psychological crisis was the loss of self-confidence among many members of the *nomenklatura* which set in during the 1970s and which, at first, was hardly noticed in the West. The deeper reasons for this development have hardly been studied, partly because it

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is a difficult subject, a confluence of different reasons. But it is also true that the subject has not appealed to Western political scientists, who continue to be puzzled and may even feel a little aggrieved about the collapse of the empire which made America, temporarily at least, the one remaining superpower. We may have to wait for the arrival of a new generation of observers and analysts who had no emotional stake in the fate of the Soviet regime.

Perhaps Communism will be lucky and escape—for a long time to come—thorough scrutiny and reflection about the reasons for its decline and fall. The transition towards a new order in the East has been chaotic, more in Russia than in Eastern Europe, and the political crises may well continue for many years to come. As a result, the number of those grumbling about the current difficulties and longing for the good old days has grown. From East Berlin to Vladivostok, Communism again appears to some in a much more blissful light than warranted by the record.

Hollander's sensitive and intelligent study is based on interviews with leading Communist functionaries, some East European, others Russian. His study shows how even people in leading positions became progressively disenchanted with the regime they served. Some of these stories are known but have not been systematically analyzed before. He draws the conclusion that political systems combining utopian aspirations with highly concentrated power are less durable than those without these attributes. One could go further and say that if Communism had never attained power it would be irrefutable and invincible, at least on the ideological level. But since Communism—unlike religion—was preoccupied with political power and the realities of this world rather than the next, the collapse was inevitable.

What are the chances of a second coming of Communism? They are not great in the near future and in its specific historical form Communism has, of course, no prospect. Even faithful party members do not want another Stalin, or even another Khrushchev or Brezhnev. But all this does not necessarily bode well for the prospects of a democratic order. The economic difficulties, the tremendous growth of the divide between rich and poor, the criminalization of society, the unbridled nationalist passions among dominant groups and minorities alike are a dangerous mixture. It is difficult to see how on this ground a stable new order will develop in the foreseeable future. The best one can hope for is that Russia will somehow muddle through. In such a situation people will be preoccupied with their present difficulties and there will be no inclination to engage in soul-searching concerning the disasters of the past which led to the present misfortunes, except on the "Secrets of the

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Kremlin" level. In the context of such psychological resistance, studies like Hollander's are doubly welcome.

Paul Hollander was in his early twenties when he left his native Hungary; Paul Lendvai, also a native of Budapest, also a scion of an assimilated Jewish family, was a few years older when he departed. Lendvai had been an active member of the youth section of the Socialist party which was swallowed in due course by the Communists. To be politically active in any party at that time was a risky business, and so in 1952 Lendvai ended up in prison; apparently, he was to appear in a political trial which in the end did not take place, though like everyone else he had signed an admission of guilt. But it took almost a year to be released, and there was no full rehabilitation. He was unemployed for a considerable amount of time but in the end returned to his chosen profession of journalism.

Like many thousands of others, Lendvai left Hungary after the uprising of 1956 and settled in Vienna. Since the demand in Europe for Hungarian journalists was limited at the time (but the supply almost unlimited), Lendvai decided to emigrate to Canada as a plumber. But the Canadian authorities, rightly perhaps, doubted his professional experience in the field of plumbing, and as a result Lendvai stayed in Vienna where he had over the years a distinguished career as a foreign journalist covering Eastern Europe for the *Financial Times*, established himself as an editor of an excellent highbrow German language quarterly, and had become a star on Austrian television. (His programs, which could be watched in various East European countries, seem to have had a considerable political impact.) In the sixties and seventies he became one of the chief interpreters of Eastern Europe and the Balkans for the West and described his extraordinary career before and after his departure from Hungary in an autobiography entitled *Blacklisted: A Journalist's Life*, a shortened version of the original German text. More recently he has published a best-selling volume entitled *The Hungarians: Victors in Defeats Over a Millennium*. This is a history of his native country with emphasis on the last two centuries. Hungarians were either aristocrats or peasants, the middle class was predominantly Jewish or German; Hungary produced a galaxy of geniuses in a variety of fields, but somehow never succeeded in accommodating them at home—they found greener pastures in Los Alamos, Princeton, and Hollywood. It is a fascinating story, not sufficiently known outside Hungary, and it has been well told by one of the prodigal sons.

Walter Laqueur

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From Fraternities to World-Class Education

In Plato's Cave. By Alvin Kernan. Yale University Press. $30.00.

Is THERE ANYTHING about the sorry state of our universities we don't know? What could Alvin Kernan possibly add to our catalogue of complaints? Not much, to be sure. All professors have their anecdotes and accounts of disaster, of high standards gone astray, of precious knowledge lost. And they recognize the foolishness of nostalgia and sentimentality. College administrators supposedly are more hard-nosed, yet are legend for their fiascoes and failures, their blathering and blundering. What then is this burnt-out English professor—who went to Williams College on the G.I. Bill of Rights, and then received his graduate education at Yale University—and sometime administrator able to add to the story of the decline and fall of the American university?

The tale is in the telling, in Kernan's erudite way of examining his charmed life in line with that of his academic career, in his subjective experiences that, simultaneously, convey as much about the changes in our elite institutions as about himself. In the process, he demonstrates rather subtly how it has become possible for the U.S. to be swimming in affluence, and in concern for its children—from its infants to its post-graduates—while cheating them of their heritage. Yes, we still claim that in our country everything is possible, that the future looms large and promising.

When we look at the statistics, we focus on our achievements by recounting that between 1960 and 1997, college enrollment has gone from 3.5 million to 12.5 million, women's share has jumped from 37 percent to 55.5 percent, federal aid to students has increased from 300 million to 12 billion dollars a year, college faculty has swelled from 235,000 to 900,000, and all high school graduates—of whatever color or race—who aspire to some sort of higher education can get it. And so on. But why then, amidst all of this abundance, do we have so many illiterate and uneducated young people?

From the wreckage of Nagasaki, Kernan arrived at Williams College. There, he immersed himself in Anglo-Saxon literature, learned about fraternity and college rites, and, like F. Scott Fitzgerald, discovered that family, money, looks, athletic ability, and personality were all determinants of success. To the young Kernan, the faculty seemed incredibly successful and sophisticated. Though rarely critical or adventurous thinkers, they made the classics come alive, and did not seem unhappy

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about hovering at the edge of poverty—while their well-heeled pupils (and their Bennington, Vassar, and Smith dates) were living it up. After Kernan landed a scholarship at Oxford, the wide world was his. At first it was Paris and London, later on (with his new wife) it was most of *Mitteleuropa*. In his vivid remembrances, I too relived great performances—by John Gielgud, Alec Guiness, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh—in London, operas in Vienna and Stuttgart, trips through the Austrian and Swiss Alps, and so on.

Then, one travelled in comfort and at affordable prices. Kernan soaked in what tourists miss, and started to feel at home on both sides of the Atlantic, while coming to grips with Shelley, *Beowulf*, Dickens, Conrad, Shakespeare, and all of the time-honored classics. Back in the U.S., he apprenticed himself to the New Critics (he had met with I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis in England), among them René Wellek, Louis Martz, Austin Warren and Maynard Mack, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks.

Instead of delving into the meaning of a literary work, its times and author's biography, as Lionel Trilling's students were taught, the New Critics examined such key linguistic devices as form, structure, imagery, symbol, point of view, irony, and ambiguity, and tried them out in various yet precise combinations. They attempted to look at literature scientifically, without embracing "scientific exactitude." Cleanth Brooks, for instance, celebrated "the well-wrought urn," W. K. Wimsatt "the verbal icon." Debates around interpretations of past masterpieces excited both faculty and graduate students; the fate of one's dissertation seemed to depend upon which faculty member "won" during the defense. After Kernan's cohorts, among them Geoffrey Hartman, Jonathan Culler, Harold Bloom, and Charles Feidelson, had been promoted to teaching jobs in 1954, they moved into a yet more systematically scientific direction, that eventually led them to French structuralism (mostly Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes). By the early 1970s, they took up deconstruction *à la* Jacques Derrida. Now, poems and fiction were being "demystified" and read as texts, and language was being radically attacked as empty, devoid of meaning or infinitely meaningful: its discourse was said to be breaking down, revealing holes, absences, tautologies, and indeterminacies. Every statement was seen to contain its opposite, subject to its interpreter's reading of the moment.

By means of chronologically arranged chapter titles Kernan describes the sway of theoretical upheavals which appeared to move almost in tandem with political ones. Yale's English department set the radical

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pace, while clinging to a halo whose golden glow was fading. The first chapter to foreshadow the effect of demographic changes and of future conflicts is chapter 5: "Keeping Them Quiet: Yale 1954-1960." Now that the G.I. students from less privileged backgrounds had become professors, they could not keep up with their peers who relied, also, on some private income. (Ambitious students received government aid, and wealthy ones family help.) This was hard on faculty wives who wanted to keep up appearances, and on their husbands who took on extra work while having to "publish or perish." Kernan's tenure tale is typical of this rite of passage in most universities. He was lucky to have found the topic for the required book and a publisher for it—and to have made it through the arduous process.

When in 1963 the president of Yale, A. Whitney Griswold, died and Kingman Brewster replaced him, the university found itself short of funds and closed down a number of departments. Two years later, Kernan accepted the job of associate provost. But he did not know what he let himself in for, and found few satisfactory means of plugging up holes in that ever more leaky barrel. By 1969, the year of uprisings, women were admitted into that male bastion. Now, secretaries' complaints were no longer handled discreetly but legally, and under the tutelage of a group of militant students, New Haven prepared for the Bobby Seale trial. Things got nasty: threats against Yale's president mounted; the community crowded around to be entertained. They cheered "radical blacks, angry faculty, outside militants, and outraged students." Yale's administrators took it all very seriously, negotiated every point, and then caved in. They thought they might lose their tax exemption from the state of Connecticut if they were not to be neutral. Kernan recalls he then believed that the courts were more competent to judge Seale's guilt or innocence than a bunch of professors, but if he did argue along such lines, he certainly was not heard. Drugs, revolution, power, and the irrational were being praised. Similar scenarios were taking place in universities large and small, public and private, while the country increasingly put its fate into the hands of the courts and the legislators. As David Frum holds in his book, *How We Got Here: The 70's—The Decade that Brought You Modern Life—For Better or Worse* (2000), the decline in learning blamed on the 1960s really happened in the 1970s with grade inflation and lack of discipline, student strikes and sheer anarchy. In other words, things went from bad to worse when faculty became laughingstocks for students who "questioned all authority," and the rhetoric of love supplanted rigorous learning.

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In 1973, Kernan became dean of Princeton's graduate school. But there, too, what had been a familial and friendly, though sometimes high-handed, relationship between administrators and students, turned adversarial. Undoubtedly, Princeton, along with all the lesser establishments of higher education, was being democratized—in order to achieve equality for minorities and women, and to "empower" the handicapped—all to the good of society. But what is good for democracy is not necessarily good for education—when students must approve new courses and their content, can demand As or Bs when deserving Fs, and otherwise manage to threaten and overturn faculty decisions.

Inevitably, American universities became ever more politicized. By means of graduate fellowships, federal tuition support, research agencies, and often inexplicit race-counting, administrators lost much autonomy but kept their institutions solvent. Kernan didn't take well to that role and returned to teaching. He viewed the effect of the decline of reading and the rise of television with regret and was devastated by the later advances of, and reliance on, telecommunications and ever more sophisticated computers: between 1963 and 1995, average SAT scores declined drastically, mostly due to lowered expectations. Kernan's formerly oversubscribed undergraduate Shakespeare course was no longer popular, and most students either had not read the texts or had not comprehended them. But his is not just an argument for tradition, rather one for imbuing students with knowledge in addition to the information they may get on the World Wide Web—and for a return to reason.

I could not help but think that when in his State of the Union address President Clinton promised a "world-class education" to every child, he offered what he and his generation have forfeited, or thrown away. For the sake of equality, we have relinquished standards—to the point where the boomers' children are unaware of the heritage they have been deprived of. Still, if those who don't know their history are bound to repeat it, will those who instead know movie history repeat what they see on the screen, as Resnais and Renoir are replacing Rimbaud and Rilke, and King Kong is replacing King Lear? Wistfully, Kernan has retreated into the library and into his books, aware that Princeton was glad to see him retire along with the rest of his generation. Yet, instead of going out with a whimper, this book has shown how while getting onto the slippery slope of concessions—for the sake of democracy—he made "the best that has been thought and said" his own. As for his students, we can only hope that a few of them will follow his example.

Edith Kurzweil

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Defending Common Sense

Against the Idols of the Age. By David Stove, edited by Roger Kimball. Transaction. $39.95.

THE GREATEST PHILOSOPHER of the twentieth century may not have been Wittgenstein, or Russell, or Quine (and he certainly wasn't Heidegger), but he may have been a somewhat obscure and conservative Australian named David Stove (1927-94). If he wasn't the greatest philosopher of the century, Stove was certainly the funniest and most dazzling defender of common sense to be numbered among the ranks of last century's thinkers, better even—by far—than G. E. Moore and J. L. Austin. The twentieth century was not a period in which philosophers distinguished themselves as essayists, or even as capable of writing interestingly on any subject outside their speciality (or even within it). Stove, though, was an essayist, polemicist, and wit of the highest order, rather like a super-intelligent H. L. Mencken. A heavyweight admirer was once led to write that "Reading Stove is like watching Fred Astaire dance. You don't wish you were Fred Astaire, you are just glad to have been around to see him in action."

Roger Kimball, author of *Tenured Radicals*, one of the original, and one of the best books that attacked the postmodernist movement in modern universities, has assembled a collection of Stove's most provocative and acute essays. During his lifetime Stove avoided the limelight, but he deserves to be widely read. In fact, he deserves to be accorded the status of an all-time great. This collection may bring about a greater recognition of his brilliance, but in a climate where academic book lists are increasingly filled with pseudo-intellectual bilgewater, this may be a vain hope. But Kimball is at least loudly declaring Stove's genius. His beautifully weighted introduction, "Who Was David Stove?"—itself something of a minor masterpiece of exposition—reveals his amazement and delight in stumbling across the work of an astonishing but relatively unknown talent—as well as the difficulty he had in finding an academic or commercial press willing to publish a collection of incisive and gleefully sardonic demolitions of modern academic orthodoxies.

Stove's greatest contribution to philosophy was his attack on the irrationalism that infests modern philosophy of science, in particular the sort of relativist and "social constructivist" views so current in sociology of science and postmodernist humanities departments, in which modern science is regarded as no better (or worse) than voodoo or

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astrology or reading chicken entrails. Much of Stove's effort in this matter was expended in attacking what he saw—quite rightly—as the source of this silliness, namely Karl Popper's view that while we can refute theories, we can never have any reason to think that a theory is true or, more to the point, that we can never have any reason to think that one theory is more likely to be true than another. (Popper also held that we have no grounds whatsoever to suppose that our past experience is any guide to the future, an affront not only to scientific reasoning but to common sense.) Popper's view has of course been enormously influential, and although its star has waned in philosophy of science, it continues to be an article of faith for the intellectual in the street, not to mention the countless third-rate lecturers who were nuzzled at its bosom.

The first part of Kimball's collection brings together three articles on this topic, including the deadly "Cole Porter and Karl Popper: The Jazz Age in the Philosophy of Science," an article that caused apoplexy amongst Popperians, including Popper himself, when it first appeared in 1985. Kimball has also included an extract from Stove's brilliant and irreverent book *Popper and After: Four Modern Irrationalists* (recently re-released under the title *Anything Goes: The Origins of the Cult of Scientific Irrationalism*). This book has achieved a legendary status in philosophy of science circles, and is another work that enrages Popperians—not least for its delicious and penetrating *bons mots*—whose devotion to Popper borders on the religious.

In these essays Stove engages in a hilarious and devastating analysis of how the ridiculous views of Popper, Thomas Kuhn, and Paul Feyerabend (as well as the lesser-known Imre Lakatos) ever managed to find such a wide acceptance amongst the intelligentsia. In particular, he shows how various linguistic devices made these views seem plausible. One of the simplest such devices was to place words like "knowledge," "discovery," "fact," "prove," "confirm," "objective," and "truth" in scare quotes. A Popperian, for example, might say that through science we have come to "know" that the "law" of gravity is a "fact." Popper's philosophy, though, entails that we do not know—and cannot possibly know—any such thing. But the presence of the words "know" and "fact," even in scare quotes, deflects attention away from this consequence of Popper's theory. Stove points out, however, that once the implications of Popper's views are presented straightforwardly, no one will take them seriously for a moment, as they are clearly ludicrous. But Popper and Kuhn have never presented their views non-evasively. J. L. Austin's phrase, "There's the bit where you say it, and the bit where

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you take it back," was never more apposite than in the case of these writers.

Stove also undoubtedly identified the real reason why Kuhn so offended the Popperians, despite the fact that his doctrine essentially amounted to the same thing as Popper's: the fact that Kuhn "bids fair, by the immense influence of his writing on 'the rabble without doors,' to make irrationalism the *majority* opinion. . .the cruelest fate which can overtake *enfant-terribles* is to awake and find that their avowed opinions have swept the suburbs."

Another brand of philosophical irrationalist whom Stove routed was the sort of philosopher, whether idealist, postmodernist, Kuhnian or cultural relativist, who holds that it is impossible for us to gain any real knowledge of the world, or (like some Marxists and some academic feminists) that our knowledge is "inescapably limited." Some of Stove's essays on this topic were collected in *The Plato Cult and Other Philosophical Follies*, and Kimball reprints one of them, "Idealism: A Victorian Horror-Story (Part II)." This piece is one of the greatest philosophical *tours de force* ever written, in which Stove shows, with consummate panache, how the central arguments for these various "cognophobe" positions all turn out to contain nothing but empty tautologies.

Stove was also a trenchant critic of the misuse of Darwinism, and the third section of Kimball's collection contains four essays from Stove's book *Darwinian Fairytales*. In attacking Darwinism, Stove lost a few admirers who had been impressed with his defenses of science. And one would be entitled to be suspicious of such a book, given that most armchair attacks on Darwinism are written by ignorant cranks, usually of one or another religious stripe. But Stove has a considerable knowledge of Darwinism (as it happens he regards Darwin as one of the greatest of all thinkers) and a brain considerably sharper than most writers on the topic, and there is nothing here that an intelligent Darwinian should disagree with, although if he is a dogmatic sociobiologist he probably will. Stove does not doubt that natural selection is overwhelmingly likely to be the true explanation of our origins, but he does reveal the sloppiness in certain Darwinian views, especially those that attempt to explain all human behavior in terms of Darwinian principles and those that use simple Malthusian principles to predict population growth. (The latter sort of view resulted in environmental doomsayers like Paul Ehrlich claiming that it was a near-mathematical certainty that we would all die of starvation in the 1970s. I may be mistaken, but I seem to recall that that didn't happen.)

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Outside of philosophy, Stove fearlessly attacked the received wisdom of modern liberals on a wide variety of topics, including feminism, racism, and the political aims of the Enlightenment, and the second section of Kimball's collection contains some of his most audacious assaults on positions which the modern left-leaning intellectual holds dear. (Further essays of this type can be found in Stove's collection *Cricket versus Republicanism*.)

Plenty of us will disagree with at least some of the opinions Stove argues for in these essays; indeed some of these opinions would get Stove lynched in the average humanities department. In fact, he was almost lynched at his own university for one essay called "A Farewell to Arts: Marxism, Semiotics and Feminism," in which he ridiculed the work of some of his postmodernist and feminist colleagues, and described the arts faculty at the venerable old University of Sydney as "a disaster-area, and not of the merely passive kind, like a bombed building, or an area that has been flooded. It is the active kind, like a badly leaking nuclear reactor, or an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in cattle." And that was just the opening paragraph!

But what makes these essays so compelling—what separates Stove from, for instance, your average angry-eyed reactionary propping up the bar at a military reunion dinner—is the startlingly brilliant way that he argues, combining, as he does, plain horse sense with the most nimble and skillful philosophical reasoning this side of Hume, along with a breathtaking wit. The result is unlike anything ever seen before. Stove has the lightest of touches, and an unerring sense for where to twist the knife, but he takes his subject matter seriously, and he never adopts a position for show, unlike some of his targets.

I'm very glad that Kimball succeeded in finding a press that would publish this book, for it is an ideal introduction to the work of an undiscovered master. (If only someone could do the same for Stove's hero, the late Donald Cary Williams of Harvard, the other great underappreciated genius of twentieth-century philosophy.) Stove is one of those writers who is either loved or hated, although in this respect he is of course hardly a rarity: plenty of gifted and entertaining writers fall into that category. What it is that makes him utterly unique amongst such a group is that he possesses an absolutely first-class brain, and—almost unheard of amongst philosophers—an ability to rigorously defend common sense without recourse to arguments that are almost as dubious as the positions they are supposed to overcome.

Scott Campbell

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Explaining the Holocaust?

The Holocaust in American Life. By Peter Novick. Houghton Mifflin. $27.00.

HISTORIANS OF JEWISH AND EUROPEAN HISTORY have been aware for some time that a focus on the Holocaust has advantages as well as drawbacks. The history of the Jews is by no means only or primarily a history of suffering, persecution, and victimization. Yet a focus on the Holocaust tends to push interest in and knowledge of Jewish theology, culture, and moral traditions to the margins. Similarly, though the Holocaust is inseparable from many of Europe's and Germany's traditions, there are many continuities and traditions which have nothing to do with it, or with Nazism, or fascism. Yet to the extent to which Americans and American Jews focus on the Holocaust, these other dimensions of European and German history fade into the background. Europe was the charnel house for the Jews but it was not only that.

Now Peter Novick, a historian at the University of Chicago most well known for his much-discussed 1988 work, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*, offers a spirited if one-sided argument about how the Holocaust became so prominent in American life. But, he does not examine other possible explanations for this relatively greater attention given to the Holocaust in America: the decline of anti-Semitism, the cosmopolitan understanding of what World War II was about, the growing sensitivity to all kinds of racism following the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, the aging survivors of the Holocaust and their determination to see that its memory will not die with them, the ability and willingness of an economically successful and highly educated American Jewish community to bring these issues to a broader public and, finally, a reception of the message because non-Jewish Americans recognized more than immediately after the Holocaust that this was the nadir of absolute evil in the twentieth century. In other words, it is possible and plausible to view the interest in the Holocaust as evidence that American society has become more tolerant, more pluralist, indeed even more multicultural in the best sense of that term. Just as Novick pointed out that in the 1960s marginalized groups had found a voice, he could argue that now the centrality of the Holocaust in European and American history represented a similar advance of knowledge.

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Instead, he casts the causes of the Holocaust's prominence largely in pejorative terms: the replacement of integrationists with identity- and victim-celebrating politics, the rise of Jewish particularism linked to a move to the political right centered on anti-Communism and efforts to deflect all criticism of Israel, and the erosion of religious and cultural sources of Jewish identity that turned the Holocaust into "virtually the only common denominator of American Jewish identity." Novick finds the idea that the Holocaust was unique to be "quite vacuous" and "deeply offensive" because it underemphasizes non-Jewish suffering. "Turning the Holocaust into the emblematic Jewish experience" has been "closely connected to the inward and rightward turn of American Jewry in recent decades"—as an expression of regrettable ethnic particularism and a retreating from a more distinctively Jewish, universalist message.

Novick's angry book, however, is not without some insights and interesting research. Unfortunately, he consistently undermines some of his better points with overstatement. Novick perceives aspects of "recent Jewish Holocaust commemoration as 'un-Jewish'," even Christian: "I am thinking of the ritual of reverently following the structured pathways of the Holocaust in the major museums which resemble nothing so much as the Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa. . . .The way suffering is sacralized and portrayed as the path to wisdom—the cult of the survivor as secular saint. These are themes that have some minor and peripheral precedent in Jewish tradition, but they resonate more powerful with major themes in Christianity." There is something to this, but in his desire to separate Jewish tradition from memory, Novick goes too far. It is wrong to claim, as he does, that Judaism fosters memory of God's handiwork but not of past suffering, as if the Old Testament had only the book of Genesis but not Exodus. The story of the Exodus, commemorated every year at Passover, calls on Jews to cultivate the memory of the bitterness of slavery and the joy of liberation. Novick writes as if this religious and then secularized largely liberal and leftist Jewish tradition of anti-redemption did not exist and had not contributed to the emergence of memory of the Holocaust.

Novick takes on the argument that de-emphasis of Nazi persecution of the Jews amounted to their "abandonment." He cites officials in the Roosevelt administration's Office of War Information who sought to convince the American public that the Germans "were everyone's enemy" and in that effort sought "to broaden rather than narrow the range of Nazi victims." To have suggested that American intervention amounted to a war to save the Jews would have, they believed, narrowed

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support for the anti-Nazi struggle, played into the hands of isolationists, and appeared to confirm Nazi propaganda about Jewish influence on Roosevelt. But the Republican Party of 1940 also had slogans such as "It's Your Country—Why Let Sidney Hillman Run it?" while some candidates attacked the "Jew Deal" and "President Rosenfeld." Moreover, in light of the German control of the continent from 1940-1944, practical prospects for rescue were "dim." As Robert Dallek, the leading historian of FDR's foreign policy has argued, his failure to intervene decisively to open possibilities for immigration or rescue was Roosevelt's most serious shortcoming. Yet, given the degree of anti-Semitism in American society—the Gallup poll indicated that it peaked around June 1944 and began to decline after the revelation of the death camps in June 1945—Novick agrees that a reduced wartime focus on the Holocaust was not necessarily an expression of anti-Semitism.

At times, Peter Novick is so mean-spirited and insensitive that he undermines his own reasonable arguments. For example, he notes that the Yiddish press had much greater coverage of the Holocaust than the Anglo-Jewish press and that wartime memorial activity was concentrated in immigrant centers like the Lower East Side and the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. The reason: "recency of immigration—which meant stronger family connections to Europe—was closely tied to the depth of feeling the Holocaust evoked among American Jews. Baldly stated, it was the difference between contemplating that abstraction 'European Jewry' being destroyed and imagining Aunt Minnie at Treblinka." The choice of the endearing "Minnie," a relative who is close, but not too close, introduces a tone of inappropriate levity. Perhaps Novick did not intend callous humor, but he should have been more careful to avoid such distractions.

While Novick sees benign causes for the relative lack of prominence of the Holocaust during World War II, he focuses on what he views as the regrettable causes of marginalization during the Cold War. As the United States mobilized to contain its former wartime ally, the Soviet Union, and to reintegrate its former enemies into the Western alliance, "talk of the Holocaust was not just unhelpful but actively obstructive." It was the "wrong atrocity" with which to mobilize anti-Soviet sentiment. Novick stresses the contribution made by the theory of totalitarianism to marginalizing the Holocaust—focusing attention to the political rather than ethnic identity of Nazism's victims. "Conversely, any suggestion that the Nazi murder of European Jewry was a central, let alone defining, feature of that regime would undermine the argument for the essential identity of the two systems."

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Yes, the work of Carl Friedrich and his students did discuss totalitarianism which had no essential link to anti-Semitism. Yet, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950), probably the single most important text in the entire "literature on totalitarianism," places anti-Semitism and the death camps in the center of its analysis, at a time when Marxists gave much shorter shrift to the dimensions of Nazi racial ideology as an autonomous factor. Arendt was able to remember the Holocaust while also pointing to the role of ideology and terror in the Soviet Union. Although the Holocaust then was not a topic of general conversation, Arendt's book was influential among intellectuals and scholars. Nor is Novick convincing when he writes that for American Jewish organizations seeking to dissociate themselves from Communism "in matters having to do with Germany there was a virtual taboo on mention of the Holocaust." Such staunch Cold War anti-Communist organizations as the American Federation of Labor, which in the early 1950s had strong ties to West German Social Democrats, spoke out forcefully for restitution for Jewish survivors. However, it is plausible, as Novick concludes, that the Cold War limited discussion of the Holocaust and that it remained largely a "private, albeit widely shared, Jewish sorrow" which did not become "a public communal emblem."

Novick discusses the Slansky trial in Prague only as an occasion for American Jewish leaders to dissociate Jews from Communism. He might have recalled that American liberals in the 1950s, not primarily American conservatives, were focused on the Slansky trial and other episodes of the "anti-cosmopolitan" purges in the Soviet bloc. They did so fully aware that the anti-Jewish persecution of the Communist 1950s paled in comparison with the Nazi Holocaust. While American Communists and leftists were quick to perceive anti-Semitism in the trial of the Rosenbergs, they did not denounce the even more blatant attacks on "Jewish monopoly capitalists" in the conspiracy theories swirling around the Soviets' trials.

Instead, Novick focuses his criticism on an American Jewish Committee press release for presenting the "grotesque fabrication" that the East German government was rounding up "non-Aryans" based on principles of selection resting on Nazi racial legislation. In fact, in 1952-53 the East German government did carry out a purge of many Jewish members of the party and government, and did frighten Jewish community leaders sufficiently to induce its major leaders to flee to the West that winter. This purge did not rest on Nazi racial legislation and was not directed at "non-Aryans" or all Jews. Jews remained in the East German government and party. Yet the anti-Semitic aspects of the purge were clear to

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anyone reading attacks on the international conspiracy of Zionists, capitalists, and imperialists in East Germany's official newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*. Novick is angrier at the American Jewish Committee for an exaggeration which captured elements of facts about the purge—and facts were hard to come by given East Germany's ability to close off access to accurate information—than about this burst of anti-Semitic politics in Europe less than a decade after the Holocaust. In West Germany, liberals and left-liberals, rather than conservatives, were most concerned about the anti-cosmopolitan purges.

Is Novick correct when he asserts that in the 1950s American Jewish religious thinkers "had nothing" to say about the Holocaust? It seems plausible, compared to "the omnipresence of the Holocaust in the 1980s and 1990s—nobody in those years seemed to have much to say on the subject, at least in public." Americans were more focused on Hiroshima than the Holocaust, both because it carried "urgent lessons" about nuclear weapons and because Americans were involved as perpetrators and potential victims. With the decline of anti-Semitism, an upbeat economy, a celebration of victory in the war, and the absence of identity politics, the Holocaust was "an inappropriate symbol of the contemporary mood, and that is surely one of the principal reasons it stayed at the margins." Novick presents evidence that in the late 1940s, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Jewish War Veterans, and the Anti-Defamation League—concerned that focusing on the Jews as victims would sponsor anti-Semitic stereotypes—opposed a Holocaust memorial in New York City, because "it would be a perpetual memorial to the weakness and defenselessness of the Jewish people" and thus would "not be in the best interests of Jewry." Novick focuses more critically on the anti-Semitism of American conservatives. But, in response to the Eichmann trial and the publication of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that the trial risked reviving anti-German sentiment—which would benefit the Communists and was pervaded by "an atmosphere of Old Testament retribution," while William F. Buckley's *National Review* argued that Communists would benefit from the "Hate Germany movement" the Eichmann trial furthered. This was just the kind of anti-Jewish backlash the leaders of Jewish organizations feared.

Though the Eichmann trial first brought the Holocaust as a discreet event to broad international and American attention, Novick argues that, instead, events in the Middle East were decisive. Specifically, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, though culminating in Israeli victory, brought home Israel's vulnerability and political isolation. In response,

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Novick argues that American Jewish organizations paid unprecedented attention to the Holocaust because its memory would deflect "legitimate grounds for criticizing Israel, to avoid even considering the possibility that the rights and wrongs were complex." Citing literature by Jewish lobbying organizations, Novick argues that the memory of the Holocaust was used for the purpose of building support for Israel and immunizing it against criticism. Yet, Novick finds it unreasonable that in light of the hostility of the Arab world, and the United Nations resolution of 1975 equating Zionism with racism, Jews and non-Jews would recall that the Holocaust had in fact occurred, and that hostility to the Jews and the Jewish state had hardly disappeared from international politics.

Finally, Novick argues that a Jewish identity focused on the Holocaust became "dominant, because it was, after all, virtually the only one that could encompass those Jews whose faltering Jewish identity produced so much anxiety about Jewish survival." This is why American Jews chose as their central representation to erect a museum in Washington, D.C. devoted to the Holocaust. Here again, Novick's critical insight is undermined by his lack of nuance. While the much discussed "crisis of meaning" probably did contribute to the emergence of the Holocaust, Novick is not convincing that identity formation was the driving force behind the establishment of the Holocaust museum. Nor is it necessarily the case that the lessons the Holocaust has to teach, such as the values of tolerance, democracy, and pluralism, are not so much wrong as they are "empty" and "not very useful"; that its memory has the effect of making us less concerned about subsequent horrors that don't match it in extremity; or that it leads us to avoid the more painful memories of racial persecution against African-Americans that are, in contrast to the Holocaust, part of American history. Novick rhetorically agrees with Emil Fackenheim's view that forgetting the Holocaust would give Hitler a posthumous victory. "But it would be an even greater posthumous victory for Hitler were we to tacitly endorse his definition of ourselves as despised pariah by making the Holocaust the emblematic Jewish experience."

The Holocaust has become—who knows for how long—a part of American mass culture. Like all discussions based on memory, it can evoke great amounts of narcissism. Most American Jewish teenagers are probably learning more about Auschwitz than about the Hebrew prophets. Some aspects of Holocaust education in the schools may teach lessons that are trivial. Examples of lobbying groups using and misusing the memory of the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes

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ought to be examined. The problem with *The Holocaust in American Life* is not that all of Novick's criticisms are wrong, but that he makes them without sufficient nuance and balance. He would have written a much better and more convincing book had he examined the host of other and equally plausible and not at all pejorative reasons for the emergence of the Holocaust as a theme in American life.

Peter Novick has placed himself in a paradoxical situation. He is a distinguished historian who bemoans the entry of the story of absolute evil in modern world history into a prominent place in American society and culture. But any agenda of scholarship to suit the political needs of the moment is objectionable. Aside from the debate about American policy during the Holocaust, Novick does not examine the historiography of the Holocaust written by American historians. This would have been the reasonable thing to do to see if the lessons they drew were profound or vacuous, narrowly ethnic and/or universal, intellectually and historiographically enduring or the stuff of transient propaganda. I cannot recall another recent example of a prominent American historian objecting so vociferously to the growing prominence of a history of persecution into public consciousness and seeing that emergence as due only to narrow, self-interested, and regrettable motives. Especially in light of long-standing complaints about complacent optimism and disinterest in history and memory in our country and our culture, one would have hoped for recognition that the emergence of the Holocaust also represents a growing decency, cultural diversity and intellectual and moral maturation of an America less innocent of history's darkest time.

Jeffrey Herf

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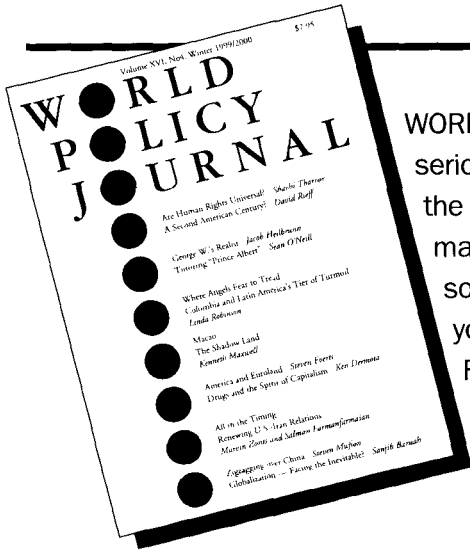
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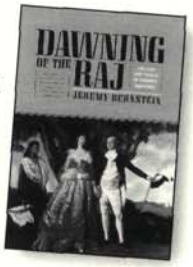

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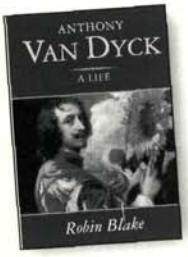

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